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CLAUSEWITZ AND GERMAN IDEALISM  
THE INFLUENCE OF G.W.F. HEGEL ON 'ON WAR'

A thesis presented to the faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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Specifically, the study argues that G.W.F. Hegel had a direct influence on the nature of Clausewitz's thought as manifested in On War.

The study proceeds by comparing both the dialectical method of analysis employed by Clausewitz and the substance of his thought concerning the state and war with those of Hegel. The primary analysis is conducted by a comparison of Hegel's thought in his Philosophy of Right (1821) with that of Clausewitz as revealed in On War (1832).

The study concludes that there is compelling evidence that Clausewitz was specifically influenced by G.W.F. Hegel. This relationship enhances our understanding of Clausewitz's theory of war. Furthermore, Clausewitz's popularity in Soviet military thought is at least partially due to its Hegelian context. Finally, the position of Clausewitz in Western liberal/democratic thinking about war is problematical when viewed from an Hegelian perspective. In both cases the existence of nuclear weapons suggest that Clausewitz's paradigm is not adequate for the future.

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## ABSTRACT

CLAUSEWITZ AND GERMAN IDEALISM: The Influence of G.W.F. Hegel on On War, by LCol L.W. Bentley, Canadian Armed Forces, 125 pages.

➤ This study analyses the influence of the German Idealist philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1779-1831) on the method and thought of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831). The study contends that a complete understanding of the nature of Clausewitz's theory and its implications for the future requires an awareness of its source in German Romantic Idealism. Specifically, the study argues that G.W.F. Hegel had a direct influence on the nature of Clausewitz's thought as manifested in On War.

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## INTRODUCTION

Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) wrote perhaps the greatest book on military theory of all time. A work of sublime proportions On War, published posthumously in 1832, has had enormous influence on political as well as military thinking literally throughout the world. Ostensibly a study restricted to an examination of the phenomenon of war, it, like all truly great works, transcends traditional boundaries between intellectual disciplines. Carl von Clausewitz's awareness of war's interrelationship with man, society and history continually provides a dimension which bestows a relevance on the work that goes beyond its particular subject matter. His efforts to expound upon these relationships, reflecting a lifetime of military experience and sober contemplation, resulted in a work of a truly philosophical nature. Just as Machiavelli can be said to have produced a philosophy of politics or Adam Smith a philosophy of economics, so too can Carl von Clausewitz be said to have produced a philosophy of war.

Carl von Clausewitz lived during a period of enormous social and political upheaval. Born and raised a Prussian, von Clausewitz joined the army at 12 years of age and participated in no less than four full campaigns against Napoleon and the French Empire, finishing with the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. His military career was complemented by a thorough grounding in political and international experience through his close association and friendship with all of the major Prussian Reformers of the period 1806-1819, including especially Gerhard



Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau. He was military tutor to the Crown Prince of Prussia, participated in all of the major events of Napoleon's invasion of Russia and was a close and keen observer of the military/political discussions after Napoleon's first defeat in 1814 and again after Waterloo.

The French Revolution and its aftermath was, of course the most obvious sign of his times. However, less spectacular but equally profound were the changes being wrought by the emerging Industrial Revolution. After his appointment as Director of the Military Academy in Berlin in 1818, Clausewitz devoted the next 12 years of his life to the observation and contemplation of all these changes. It was only after he had thoroughly thought through the implications of the enormous chasm created between the old and the new that he was finally able fully to articulate his theory of war.

It was during these final years of reflection that Clausewitz realized that the major philosophical issue before him was the nature of the changes occurring in war and how to account for them. War had changed radically in his own lifetime and von Clausewitz was fully aware that these changes reflected immense transformation in the social and political environment from whence war sprang. If his theory were to go beyond description, if, as he demanded, it were to acquire explanatory power, Clausewitz knew that he had to account for both the change and diversity of his subject in a rigorous, indeed philosophical way.

As he struggled with his subject von Clausewitz brought to bear the intellectual tools acquired over a lifetime of experience and study. Born during the twilight of the German

Enlightenment ( Aufklärung ) Carl von Clausewitz was heir to the intellectual legacy of men such as Christian Wolff, Gerholt Lessing and Johann Herder. Before Clausewitz joined the army Immanuel Kant had already published all three of his great "Critiques" which revolutionized philosophy ( Critique of Pure Reason 1781, Critique of Practical Reason 1788, Critique of Judgement 1791 ). Despite its unique nature, the Aufklärung was an integral part of the wider European Enlightenment.

Deriving from and firmly based on the Aufklärung was the general movement in Germany known as Idealism. In its broad outlines Idealism spread its influence over a wide range of intellectual activities in Germany throughout Clausewitz's lifetime. Goethe and Schiller, Schliermacher, the Schlegels, Fichte and Schelling all reflected its major tenets. Each of these men and many others contributed to its content. One of the key concepts reflected in the work of all these representatives of Idealism was that of Bildung. In the context of the times this concept took on a meaning well beyond its literal translation of education. Bildung meant the progressive and active pursuit of the development of a harmonious, whole personality. It held out the promise of the perfectibility of man and ultimately society through vigorous personal and cultural self-improvement.

Carl von Clausewitz was a dedicated believer in Bildung and sought its rewards through a lifetime of study and intellectual effort. His philosophical appetite had been whetted while a student at the military academy 1801-1803 where he attended Professor Kiesewetter's lectures on Kant. From this

time onward he read extensively in the Idealistic literature of the day. Schiller was a favorite and he certainly studied the Idealistic philosophy of Johann Fichte.

Idealism offered Clausewitz the framework he sought for his more specific study. It was a philosophy concerned above all with capturing the diversity of life within a single philosophical unity. Reality was complex and change was an inherent aspect of this reality. Therefore Idealistic theory and method must itself reflect change while containing it. Beginning with Kant and continuing through the more theoretical work of Fichte and Schelling, Idealistic systems of thought accomplished this goal through the use of the dialectic. Dialectic Idealism was a well known method of inquiry and analysis in the Germany of Clausewitz's day and it is not surprising that he therefore had recourse to it in his own work.

The foremost exponent of German Idealism and its best known dialectician was Georg Wilhelm Frederick Hegel (1779-1831). By the time Hegel arrived in Berlin in 1818 he had already constructed and published a massive metaphysical system of thought. Through his subsequent 13 years of lecturing at the University of Berlin he totally dominated German philosophy. He published his Philosophy of Right in 1821 and his lecture notes on the philosophy of history were published by his son, shortly after his death. In effect, Hegel perfected the dialectic in the course of his work and Dialectical Idealism became virtually synonymous with his name.

Hegel's thought would naturally have appealed to Carl von Clausewitz. Conflict and change were the motivating forces

behind its development and the resulting theory is thoroughly monistic. Reflecting Hegel's view that reality was a structure of contradictions Dialectic Idealism ended with a theory of the state in which force and war were inevitable and recurrent phenomena. But if war was an ever present feature of Hegel's reality, it was not the dominant one. Man and society, war and peace were all aspects of a history at the center of which was the evolution of the state. Hegel accorded the state absolute supremacy and was convinced that it was through the finally realized perfect state that man achieved his true freedom and self-fulfillment. This even more than the significance of war closely paralleled Carl von Clausewitz's own matured thought.

But did Hegel, the pre-eminent philosopher of the day, directly influence the Prussian military theorist? Did von Clausewitz, as he cast around for a definite system of thought within the general context of German Idealism, finally have recourse to the Hegelian system, or at least major elements of it, in order to structure his evolving theory?

There is no unequivocal evidence that von Clausewitz was directly influenced by Georg Hegel. He made no mention of him in his letters or notes. Although he may well have moved in the same social circles as the admittedly gregarious Idealistic philosopher there is again no direct evidence that Clausewitz attended his lectures or even knew the man personally. Nonetheless it is difficult, being aware of the nature of the times and Hegel's response to them, to read On War without at least a vague feeling that the spirit of their work was similar. As Walter Görlitz put it, "There is it is true, no proof that

Hegel's philosophy had influenced him [Clausewitz] or that he had read his works, but very often the thought of a particular period seems to lie, so to speak, in the air".<sup>1</sup>

Proof of Hegel's influence upon Clausewitz must be sought in a careful analysis and comparison of their thought as expressed in their individual works. The present study takes this approach, focussing primarily, although not exclusively, on seeking Hegelian influences in von Clausewitz's major treatise On War. The study compares Hegel's method and philosophy to that revealed in On War with the use of both primary and secondary sources.

Before getting directly at the particular issue of influence on On War, however, it is necessary to provide the context, both historical and intellectual in which these men lived and worked. Both men sought to unify the diversity of their subject matter in one monolithic theory and at the same time account for change. Therefore Chapter One examines the changes that occurred over the period of their lives. It attempts to describe the main outlines of what von Clausewitz himself might have noted looking back over his life just before he sat down to revise his preliminary draft of On War. The changes in war were of course the ones of immediate concern to von Clausewitz but he was acutely aware of their interdependence on the evolving conception and nature of both the state and the international system. Without a thorough and sensitive appreciation of the latter he could not achieve the perfection he sought in explaining the former.

But changes in the raw data of experience cannot normally be

recognized except through the medium of prevailing attitudes and intellectual traditions and perspectives. In the case of von Clausewitz these were formed within the context of the predominant movement of his time and place - German Idealism. Chapter two therefore traces the origins of this intellectual school and describes its main tenets. It is not possible to understand either Clausewitz or Hegel outside of German Idealism. In addition, to attempt to compare the works of the two men without at least a general awareness of the enormous debt both men owed to the same intellectual sources would be difficult in the extreme.

Once an adequate context is established the study turns to the question of Hegel's method and substantive philosophy and their possible influences on On War. Chapter III describes and compares Hegel's dialectic as developed in The Phenomenology of Spirit (1807) and The Logic of Science (1813-16) with the Clausewitzian dialectic in On War. Only the most general account of this complex and subtle subject is provided here. However, this is probably valid in that Clausewitz himself would only have seen Hegel's method as a broad guide or methodological assist once he had been convinced of its validity beyond the specific purposes Hegel put it to.

Chapter IV turns to the more concrete issues of political philosophy. Here the study is only interested in the resulting political views Hegel expounded, not their metaphysical or ethical origins in his massive, earlier works. Reliance, therefore is exclusively on his Philosophy of Right (1821) and his Philosophy of History (published posthumously). Since On

War does not often explicitly state Clausewitz's particular political views or philosophy, a certain amount of interpretation is necessary. This however has been substantiated through recourse to shorter, more political memoranda and essays written by von Clausewitz as well as excellent and authoritative secondary sources such as Peter Paret's Clausewitz and the State, R. Aron's Clausewitz: Penser la Guerre or H. Camon's Clausewitz.

Chapter V attempts to summarize the nature of the evidence concerning Hegel's influence on Carl von Clausewitz. The study concludes that there is persuasive, if not definitive evidence, that Carl von Clausewitz was certainly cognizant of the method and nature of Hegel's thought. This awareness is reflected in On War. However, one additional judgement is also outlined in chapter V. If, as this study concludes, Clausewitz's thought is at least in part Hegelian, what are the implications and the relevance of this conclusion today? Does it help account for On War's continued popularity since its appearance in 1832? More importantly does it make Clausewitz more or less relevant today; more or less relevant in the liberal/democratic West or Marxist Leninist Russia? These final issues are addressed briefly in Chapter V more with a view to inviting further analysis and discussion than providing definitive answers.

# ENDNOTES

1. Walter Görlitz, History of the German General Staff trans. Brian Battershaw (London: Hallis and Carter, 1953), p 62.



## CHAPTER I

### The Historical Context Man, the State and War 1730-1830

Carl von Clausewitz was born in 1780 amidst the gathering forces of change which by the time of his death in 1831 had transformed Europe. Throughout his life von Clausewitz was witness to and often participant in events, which taken together, comprised two revolutions; one immediate and traumatic, the other less violent, longer lasting but equally profound. The French and Industrial Revolutions created massive changes, the full implications of which were by no means clear when von Clausewitz died in 1831.

The roots of both revolutions were buried deep in a European history, to which Clausewitz was acutely attuned. By the time he wrote the Note of 1830, explaining that despite major revisions he was not yet satisfied with his treatise, On War, Carl von Clausewitz had struggled mightily with changes wrought in the previous fifty years. Although he devoted his treatise exclusively to the analysis of war itself, Clausewitz was keenly aware of war's dependence upon the political, economic and social environment from whence it sprang. On War was inspired by change and Carl von Clausewitz intended to account for this process by linking all the elements of war, past, present and future, into a unified whole.

The precise nature of these changes influenced not only the final structure of the treatise, but also the very method chosen to accomplish the task. After all von Clausewitz himself tells

us in a note written in 1818 that his original approach had been to imitate the method of Montesquieu in his l'Esprit des lois. As Clausewitz put it, this descriptive approach did not suit his 'systematic' nature and he took a different tack.<sup>1</sup> In part, at least, this change in direction appears to have been motivated by a need to account for the change and diversity in war in a more rigorous, indeed philosophical way.

Clearly, there is no time in history when change is absent, nor for that matter, when it precludes elements of continuity. Nonetheless, the century under consideration here, the boundaries of which are somewhat arbitrarily drawn, represents a particularly significant era of change. As one of the leading historians of the period puts it, "most authorities agree that the years 1792-1815 marked a major turning point, closing a period which had begun about 1500 and opening a period from which we have not yet clearly emerged."<sup>2</sup>

Historical hindsight was not a prerequisite for a recognition of the significance of events occurring at this time. The great German dramatist Johann Goethe, who observed the cannonade at Valmy on 20 September 1792, remarked: "This is the beginning of a new epoch in world history".<sup>3</sup> Perhaps at 12 years of age young Carl would not have been so perceptive but there is little doubt that by the time of the Congress of Vienna the fundamental change inherent in the preceding 23 years was not lost on the mature Clausewitz.

Historians agree the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire represent a watershed in modern European history. On one side was the so called Age of Reason or Enlightenment, broadly lasting

from 1700-1789 and closely associated with the political/social structure of states often denoted as the Ancien Regime. The relationship between the two was a complex one. The Enlightenment, with its insistence on the primacy of the rational over the traditional, supported the evolution from the feudal corporate state to the period of so called enlightened despotism. On the other hand, the long term implications of much of the thought in the Age of Reason foreshadowed additional radical changes to come. Montesquieu, Locke and Rousseau were representative of a number of individuals whose work was already undermining absolutism and preparing the way for the coming upheaval and the emergence of the nation-state.

On the other side of this watershed is the Age of Romanticism and the culmination of the developing concept of the nation-state. Underlying the more obvious political and social changes associated with this process was the Industrial Revolution. If not always directly responsible for events, its influence grew substantially after 1780 and became pronounced in several European states by the time of Clausewitz's death. The complex relationship between economic change, the growth of the middle class in Europe and the thought of the Romantic era had a profound impact on the direction of change and its particular form.

Change therefore, revolutionary, fundamental and irreversible was a dominant feature of this period. One of the main signposts of change was the perception, not only of change per se but of an alteration of the image of the world in men's minds from a relatively unified conception to an increasingly

complex one. There was decreasing consensus about man's nature, the structure of society and its proper organization. A corresponding need developed not only to accommodate change but to do so in such a way as to bridge the gap between old and new. Change, many felt, had to be accounted for in a manner which unified, or more accurately, re-unified experience. This impulse manifested itself in a number of ways. For example many supported the forces of restoration which sought a return to the status quo ante of the French Revolution; while others, led by the rising middle class, sought consensus around the laissez-faire economic system of Adam Smith and its economically based concept of progress. Yet a third approach, centered in Germany, stressed the role of ideas and the teleological nature of history. Reality was change, the striving for the final realization of man's total freedom on earth. This was Idealism and Clausewitz's thought is rooted in this distinctly philosophical approach.

At the very center of this process of change was the evolution in the nature of the state. Clausewitz was certainly aware of the profound significance of this development. In fact he regarded the growth of the modern state as the most fundamental process in history. Few other men identified as clearly the dynamic and logic that caused a self-sufficient aristocracy to give way to the absolute monarchs who in turn fell victim to the nation state.<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz's unique contribution to a thorough understanding of this transformation was his treatment of it in terms of force and power. He was convinced that changes in the state were reflected in changes in

the nature of war. His exposition of the latter reflected a fundamental understanding of the former.

Thus by bridging the gap between the old and new forms of warfare revealed by the armies of the French Revolution and Napoleon, Clausewitz also accounted for the political changes underlying his theory. He was a keen student of military history in addition to being extremely well read in contemporary and past military thought. His synthesis of the work of the major theorists of his day provided a theoretical framework which accommodated all the important aspects of the two principal schools of thought.

A whole complex of political, social, economic and technical factors contrived throughout most of the 18th century to limit war. On the other hand, progress in the art of war was by no means absent. As the nature of the state changed so too did war. Change in many areas normally was evolutionary. However, once the French Revolution provided the social and political means, Napoleon revolutionized war, using tools created and even honed by his predecessors. The overall impact, was doubtless a dramatic and distinct transformation in war which challenged even the greatest thinkers of the age. As R.R. Palmer has written, "the period of 1740-1815 saw the perfection of an older style of war and the launching of a new."<sup>5</sup>

Long before the French revolution, however, war had been the subject of considerable interest for a variety of intellectuals and soldier scholars throughout Europe. They brought to their subject a wide variety of perspectives and the wars of 1789-1815 served only to increase both their numbers and their viewpoints.

Many of these authors were interested only in improving the military's capability to serve the state. Issues such as the nature of war, its relationship to society, and its possible future, were left by these reformers to a different group of more philosophically minded men whose influence usually outlived more technical works of relatively limited influence. Nonetheless, as Robert Quimby has clearly established, these exclusively military innovators were responsible for the discovery and articulation of virtually all the tactical innovations used in the wars of the French revolution and Napoleon.<sup>6</sup>

Both groups of theorists appear in most European countries in the last 30 years or so of the 18th century. Military theory in France, for example, reached perhaps as high a point as it has ever attained in the years between her humiliating defeat in the Seven Years War (1756-63) and the French revolution.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, William Shanahan writes in his Prussian Military Reforms that there was "a literal eruption of military writing in Prussia in the last quarter of the 18th century".<sup>8</sup> This resulted not from defeat but more from the inquisitive, scientific attitude of the Enlightenment, as well as a growing spirit of reform after Frederick the Great's death in 1786. Evidence of this growing interest in military issues and their relevance to the state can be found in the growth in the numbers of specialized organizations formed for the study of those matters. Two of particular note were the Patriotic Society for Students of the Art of War formed in Hesse in 1792 and Gerhard von Scharnhorst's Militarische Gesellschaft founded in 1801 in Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the more serious military writers recognized that war had manifested a dual nature throughout history. On the one hand it was obvious that there were regularities in war. There were mechanical aspects to its conduct and much appeared amenable to quantification. That is to say, war was scientific. On the other hand, human frailty and blind chance revealed the dark face of war, that aspect where uncertainty and irrationality reigned supreme. As Marshal Saxe observed, "war is a science replete with shadows in whose obscurity one cannot move with assured step".<sup>10</sup>

The identification of the dualism inherent in war was certainly not the work of any one man nor was it anything but common knowledge to anyone who studied the matter seriously. The real issue, however, came when a given theorist sought to distill the essence of war from his subject matter. Here invariably two divergent schools of thought developed, one stressing the scientific, the other the irrational side of war. The former viewpoint clearly was most in tune with the fundamental impulses of the Enlightenment. These analysts hoped to render the non-scientific dimension of war impotent or at least manageable through careful identification and subsequent application of scientifically based rules. The latter approach, although never absent in the 18th century, gained strength as Romanticism grew in influence and the wars of the French revolution illustrated its reality.

Generally speaking both schools of thought could, and often did, argue that their approach was the one most calculated to eliminate war itself. As Gerhard Ritter has described the

situation at the turn of the 19th century: "Many people hoped that war would ultimately eliminate itself, having become a pure universal science by means of mathematical equations that ruled out chance and the fortunes of war. Others sought to reach the same goal by the opposite route - through proof that war was chaotic and wholly irrational, subject to blind chance. War was senseless they argued and belonged to a barbarous stage in the history of mankind that must be overcome by enlightened thought".<sup>11</sup> Thus Heinrich von Bülow, a leading proponent of the "scientific school", argued in his Geist des Krießsystem (1799) "If the true principles of this science were equally known everywhere one could soon renounce war as futile, since the armies trained and commanded with equal skill could not gain from each other and thus the inexpediency of war would induce an uninterrupted peace which probably will not so soon result from the benevolent opinions of the men of our earth".<sup>12</sup>

Clausewitz recognized the duality inherent in war. He totally accepted it and demanded only that any theory of war which purported to understand the phenomenon must accord each dimension its appropriate, that is, equal, due. However, Clausewitz was as much inspired to refute any position arguing that war could be eliminated as he was by the need to explain its inner dynamics. Clausewitz despaired of those wishful thinkers of any persuasion whose theoretical efforts might weaken the state by an untenable view of war and its future.

Two other widely read and influential theorists of the pre-revolutionary period supported von Bülow's view of the essence of war, if not his belief in the possibilities of its



impending extinction. These were the English mercenary Major-General Lloyd and the French Comte de Guibert. Lloyd's History of the Late War in Germany (1766) and his final Military Memoirs (1781) both identify the two spheres of war and even discuss its political nature with considerable erudition. Nonetheless, it was in mathematics and topography, those most exact sciences of war, that he saw the true basis of the art of war.<sup>13</sup> According to Lloyd, the careful application of his methods to war would lead to success without a battle ever having to be fought.<sup>14</sup>

The Comte de Guibert, whose work made him something of a celebrity in late 18th century France, ended his theorizing by agreeing with Lloyd. Although his first major work Essai general de la tactique (1772) was almost prophetic in its anticipation of the nature and explanation of Napoleonic warfare, he probably never really believed that the European system was capable of producing such a transformation. Guibert, who was clearly a product of the Enlightenment, is, in the opinion of some, the most important military theorist of the 18th century.<sup>15</sup> By 1779 in his Defense du Systeme de guerre modern he was fulsome in his praise of the theory and practise of 18th century warfare and its ultimate basis in science.

Ironically the wars of the French revolution and Napoleon did not radically change the nature of the theoretical conflict between the two main schools of thought. Rather these experiences tended to reinforce one or the other approach depending on which aspects of war the theorist was predisposed to emphasize. Those inclined to the belief that war was scientific

in essence could find much to recommend this view in the manner in which Napoleon had conducted his campaigns. Similarly the role of esprit de corps, genius and chance was everywhere evident and could easily justify the position that war at its most basic was a matter of the spirit and not amenable to rules, axioms and mathematical principles.

This latter position was the one adopted by one of the most influential military writers in Europe of the late 18th century, Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst, a veteran of the Seven Years War and a keen observer of the wars of the French revolution. His Considerations of the Art of War (1797) represents one of the most cogent presentations of the anti-scientific arguments concerning the nature of war. Berenhorst's position is characteristic in many ways of the view of war held by many of the romanticists. His strong, compelling skepticism inspired many, including to some extent von Clausewitz, to attempt to refute him.<sup>16</sup> He revealed his essential point in his remarks on Frederick the Great's successes in the Seven Years War when he concluded: "It is true that sometimes in modern war results such as those will be attained, however, one cannot organize for this. These results depend entirely on the current mood of the troops and immediate circumstances, ruled by chance. It is impossible to establish tactical rules for those situations".<sup>17</sup>

Over against Berenhorst one finds first von Bülow and then finally Baron Antoine Jomini. Both men agree that rigorous, scientific analysis will reveal a sound, methodical basis for the conduct of war, although Jomini transcends the more obvious mechanistic arguments of von Bülow and many other members of the

"scientific" school of war. Von Bülow's analysis of "bases of operations" and their geometric relationship to an army's "lines of operations" led him to conclude that understanding of this system could eliminate the need for fighting at all.<sup>18</sup> Von Bülow's publication of his further thoughts on his 1797 work in 1805 so annoyed Clausewitz that he felt compelled to resort for the first time to print to refute his fellow Prussian.<sup>19</sup>

Jomini's works are more sophisticated than von Bülow's and are without question the most durable and influential of this whole school. Nevertheless, Jomini's theory was an anatomical analysis more than a physiological or psychological one. His was distinctly a post-mortem analysis, not a creative work for the future. "Jomini had little or no conception of the affect of the evolution of the art of war on operations but believed immutable principles of war could be derived from the wars he had known."<sup>20</sup>

In summary, during the period under review the transformation in warfare was both evolutionary and revolutionary. In addition, war became more complex and more diverse. Like much else in this era of upheaval, it offered a significant challenge to those who wished to explain it. Two schools of thought continued to compete for acceptance in the minds of those men attempting to understand what war had become and its utility in the future.

Complicating the situation was the fact that war as an instrument of state policy was a concept increasingly under challenge. Liberal/democratic political theory, based largely on the growing middle class in Europe, increasingly argued that war

was an anomaly. States in the future must eschew war because of its adverse impact on commerce and the economic and therefore political well-being of peoples everywhere. To bridge the theoretical gap between the wars of Frederick the Great and those of Napoleon was a daunting enough prospect. However, this task could only be truly tackled within a philosophical framework which accepted the inevitable existence of war in history both past and future. In other words, as will be demonstrated, On War could not have been written, for example, by any liberal, laissez-faire political theorist of the final quarter of the 18th century.

When the various changes briefly outlined in this chapter are viewed, as they must be, as an interdependent, fluid historical process the dominant impression created is one of fundamental change. Furthermore, this change complicated human life. Its ramifications were apparent in the economic and social sphere as well as the political. During the period in which the nature of many of these changes was being identified, a number of people in several disciplines attempted to interpret what was happening and perhaps even venture some predictions about the future. One major effort in this regard was that of the German Idealist school of philosophy. A direct descendant of the Aufklärung, German Idealism dominated German thought throughout the first 25 years of the 19th century and impacted on virtually all intellectual endeavors. It is to this intellectual movement and its overriding concern with the re-unification of nature and spirit that we must now turn.

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## CHAPTER II

### The Intellectual Context Clausewitz and German Idealism

In describing Carl von Clausewitz's treatise On War the noted German historian Gerhard Ritter declared that "the book breathes the spirit of German Idealism".<sup>1</sup> More pointedly, Peter Paret, the author of Clausewitz and the State, has stated that Clausewitz's most original achievement was subjecting the problems of armed conflict between nations to the dialectical analysis of German Idealistic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> It is to this 'spirit' of Idealism, its nature and influence that this chapter now turns.

That Clausewitz's work reflected the compelling, even profound, influence of German Idealism is not surprising when one realizes that after 1770 German intellectual life burst forth in a stream of creative achievements that made this age of German civilization one of the greatest in its history. Many of these achievements, spanning most areas of intellectual endeavor from art and literature through psychology, sociology, and politics, were strongly influenced by the movement known as German Idealism.

Of course, Idealism did not appear full blown as a complete, intellectual system in 1770. The movement itself grew from that peculiarly German version of the European Age of Reason, the Aufklärung or German Enlightenment. This Germanized version of the great eighteenth century phenomenon was a necessary preparatory stage for German Idealism. According to Hajo

Holborn, Idealism naturally contained many of the Aufklärung's fundamental impulses.<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between the two intellectual phenomena or their respective influences on the generation of scholars and artists spanning the period from the 1770's to the 1830's when the last great leaders of German Idealism passed away. Thus, for example, Peter Paret has demonstrated that with regard to both method and terminology the philosophers of the Enlightenment, as well as those of the German Idealistic movement, decisively influenced von Clausewitz.<sup>4</sup>

Paret's observation emphasized the fact that during this whole period men of the first order of intellectual achievement transcended any one movement, school of thought, or theory. Klaus Epstein has shown that the German intellectual giants most marked by the Aufklärung's spirit all strove consciously to transcend the movement.<sup>5</sup> Epstein was talking specifically about writers, philosophers, and statesmen, such as Goethe, Schelling and Stein, but his comment applies with equal force to Carl von Clausewitz. All these men pursued an eclectic approach to knowledge and its application. They took the best, the most promising from one era and built on it in the next. To say that Clausewitz was powerfully influenced by the German Enlightenment only means, in light of Epstein's comment, that this influence better prepared him to absorb and make his own, the intellectual tools of the subsequent period of German Idealism during his most productive, mature years after the Napoleonic Wars.

Essentially, Idealism maintains that the world depends on 'ideas' and that objects exist only insofar as they are the



subjects of consciousness. Idealism denies the independent existence of the physical world and insists instead that the world is in some sense a product of the activity of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> In direct contrast to the approach of empiricism or materialism, Idealism fully accepts, even expects, that the philosophic account of the world has little similarity to what is usually referred to as the 'common sense' view of reality. German Idealists of the 18th and 19th century varied to the degree to which they insisted upon the unreality of the phenomenal or sensual world around us, but they all, nonetheless, placed enormous stress on consciousness and its power. To some extent all these Idealists believed that ideas and experiences themselves were the raw material from which the world was constructed.

Given the historical circumstances at the end of the 18th century in Europe, German Idealism was a fully understandable development in the intellectual history of that cultural nation. Notwithstanding the debt Idealism owed to the earlier Aufklärung, its sources were also firmly rooted in the rather unique social and economic circumstances of Germany.

Idealism rose to prominence in Germany during the period 1780-1830, whereas in the rest of Western Europe empiricism and materialism continued to gain strength. This is attributable in some measure to the existence of a significantly different social structure in the majority of German states compared to the remainder of Europe. In fact what was missing was an independent middle class of any consequence. "Germany was many decades behind her Western neighbors in her social and political history.

The most striking element in this backwardness was the virtual absence of a politically influential middle class. Since it was the middle class that had prompted political progress and reform in Western Europe this was a fact of profound importance".<sup>7</sup>

Although, for example, in Prussia the King was served by a political bureaucracy of very high capability Friedrich Meinecke has demonstrated persuasively that "the intelligence and energy of this institution simply could not take the place of middle class drive and enterprise".<sup>8</sup>

Thus Idealism depended on factors for the success of its program other than the economic and material. Idealists believed reason was capable of guiding practice. Indeed reason itself had the power to determine reality. This was only possible, however, if people understood the true nature of reason. Therefore, Idealism depended to a large degree on a process of education. According to Hegel "education is the art of making man ethical".<sup>9</sup> Freedom was the goal of history. Hegel summed up the whole Idealist position when he concluded that "the final purpose of education is liberation".<sup>10</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz was much influenced by both these tendencies in Idealism - the belief in the need for education in man's ethical development and the power of reason in the world. He was very interested in and influenced by the educational views and theories of men such as Johann Fichte (1762-1814) and the Swiss educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1756-1827). Pestalozzi had made positive and concrete the negative and general educational principles enunciated by Rousseau. His definition of education as "the natural, progressive and

harmonious development of all the powers and capacities of the human being"<sup>11</sup> held great appeal for the Idealists in general, and, as Peter Paret has made clear, directly influenced Carl von Clausewitz.<sup>12</sup>

Like Fichte, Clausewitz also held the view that the people were capable of asserting their freedom within the internal order of the state but that they must be led to it and even rigorously compelled to it by the constituted government.<sup>13</sup> As with Fichte and Hegel, Clausewitz's thinking was Idealist through and through. As a true Idealist he was filled with a triumphant faith in the power of the mind. Friedrich Meinecke argues that "Clausewitz's sharp dialectical mind had been schooled in the philosophic writings of his age; from them he acquired his fearless critical faculty, his constructive sense for interconnectedness and patterns, and his awareness that the mind shaped reality."<sup>14</sup> It was this Idealist belief, for example, which led Clausewitz to argue in On War that it is really the commander's ability to identify "... the whole business of war completely with himself that is the essence of good generalship. Only if the mind works in this comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them".<sup>15</sup>

German Idealism assigned such power to the mind because Idealists had redefined the nature and role of reason. German Idealists objected to the monopoly of reason which the Enlightenment had established, instead, arguing that it did not adequately account for matters of spirit. Hegel, for example, concluded that reality was both immense and complex, too complex

to be exhaustively explained by the neat conceptual scheme of 18th century rationalism.<sup>16</sup>

German Idealists were therefore particularly susceptible to many of the ideas of the Romantic movement. This latter school of thought emphasized the emotional even irrational side of reality and accorded it an equal status with reason. In addition, Romanticism stressed the organic structure of reality, maintaining that nature was a seamless web, parts of which could not be separated from the whole without disrupting the entire edifice. To the extent, therefore, that Romanticism influenced particular Idealists one can distinguish between Classical Idealists and Romantic Idealists.

Carl von Clausewitz can be closely associated with the Romantic Idealists. As Peter Paret has amply demonstrated: "In the great movement of Romantic Idealism that dominated intellectual life at the turn of the 19th century, Clausewitz's position can be easily recognized. He rejected the popular Enlightenment, with its doctrinaire faith in rationality and progress, and found no difficulty in acknowledging limitations to human understanding, an acceptance that made reason all the stronger in those areas left to it".<sup>17</sup> If anything Raymond Aron's characterization of Clausewitz as "patently of his time" is even more to the point. He concludes that Clausewitz represents a period of transition between the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the romanticism and historicism of the first half of the 19th century.<sup>18</sup> The theory of conflict embodied in On War can be readily identified as part of Paret's "great movement". It is reflected, for example, in Clausewitz's comment

that "after all waging war is not merely an act of reason, nor is reasoning its foremost activity".<sup>19</sup>

The above brief discussion of the broad outlines of Romantic Idealism should be sufficient to place Carl von Clausewitz firmly within its context. The way is now clear for a more focused and detailed analysis of the relationship between its foremost representative and Carl von Clausewitz. G.W.F. Hegel's influence on both Clausewitz's methodology and his theory of the state and war is addressed below in Chapters III and IV respectively. However, before turning exclusively to Hegel's particular impact on Clausewitz it is appropriate to conclude here with a brief look at Clausewitz's direct and indirect contact with Idealism's main protagonists.

Carl von Clausewitz almost certainly was familiar with the work of Kant, most probably through the lectures of a certain professor Kiesewetter during his three years at the Military Academy 1801-1804. Both Peter Paret and the British philosopher W.B. Gallie have argued persuasively that if any of the German Idealists were particularly influential on von Clausewitz it was Kant.<sup>20</sup> Later in Clausewitz's life he was also closely associated with Herman von Boyen, who had heard Kant himself lecture at Konigsberg and had subsequently made a serious study of his philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, although their precise relationship is unknown, there is no doubt that von Clausewitz had much contact with Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose views on education so closely paralleled Clausewitz's own. Concerning other classical Idealists there is evidence that he had read much if not all of Goethe though it was Schiller who was the author

most mentioned in Clausewitz's letters.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, Schiller was also probably the most direct influence on Hegel.<sup>23</sup>

Clausewitz was certainly aware of Fichte's work and would have heard about and probably read his Addresses to the German Nation given in the winter of 1807-1808. We know that he corresponded with Fichte on the subject of Frederick the Great and Machiavelli. Their common concerns on a number of issues make it quite plausible that the Idealism of Fichte could have had considerable potential influence on von Clausewitz.

Another direct source of Romantic influence on this future philosopher of war occurred during his so called "captivity" in France and Switzerland after Prussia's defeat at Jena. Paret tells us that he spent several months together with the Prussian Crown Prince at Madame de Stael's in Switzerland in the company of the well known leading Romantic William Schlegel. On his return to Prussia Clausewitz was intimately involved with the whole of the Prussian reform movement and is therefore inextricably involved also with the wave of Romantic Idealism engulfing Prussia at this time. Even the decidedly un-romantic Stein has admitted that whatever success the reform movement in these years had owes a great deal to Romanticism.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, what of Clausewitz's exposure to Hegel and his works. There appears to be no direct evidence that Clausewitz actually read Hegel's work. It is certain however, that Clausewitz spent the years 1818-1831 in Berlin and thus inhabited the same city for the same dozen odd years during which Hegel reigned supreme at the University of Berlin. Paret tells us that

not surprisingly in these circumstances they had several mutual friends. Additionally Peter Creuzinger, author of Hegel's Einfluss auf Clausewitz, argued that just as Kiesewetter may have been Clausewitz's entre to Kant, so an Hegelian instructor at the Military Academy and close friend of Clausewitz may have served the same function with regard to Hegel's influence.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever direct evidence does or does not link Carl von Clausewitz with the sources of German Idealism during the first thirty years of the 19th century, the final issue depends on a careful analysis of his methods and work as compared to those of the undisputed leader of this movement. It is to just such an analysis that we now turn.

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### Chapter III

#### Clausewitz and Hegel The Dialectic in On War

Clausewitz was clearly a product of the era of German Idealism. Together with other German Idealists of the period he shared in the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment. There is no doubt, however, that he transcended the 18th century in his attempts to formulate a coherent theory of war, incorporating both its historical diversity as well as its conceptual duality as both art and science. Clausewitz's thought, in fact, took its character from the transitional phase between the disintegrating institution of absolutism and the age of rising nationalism.<sup>1</sup> A dominant intellectual influence during this phase was Romanticism.

Like Clausewitz, Hegel was the heir to the French and German Enlightenment and was equally influenced by Romanticism. He was once referred to as "that magician who attempted to reconcile Romanticism with the theories of the Enlightenment".<sup>2</sup> Hegel's Romantic dimension is most evident in his overall goal for philosophy - a sense of total harmony with the world - a sense of unity. This goal was precisely Clausewitz's intention for his theory of war. On War, in fact the culmination of a lifetime of thinking about war, has actually been described "as a flower of German Romanticism".<sup>3</sup>

The German historian Friedrich Meinecke described Clausewitz as "by far the most modern of the Prussian Reformers although his

intellectual world still bore unmistakable traits of neo-classicism and the Enlightenment".<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz's modernism derives from the fact that he had transcended the forms of thought and dominant impulses of the Enlightenment to a much greater degree than other reformers such as Stein and Humboldt. The rationalism of the 18th century with its cosmopolitan flavour and promise of almost unhindered progress did not survive the forces of modernism already gaining strength in the early 19th century. Nationalism, Romanticism, Liberalism and Industrialism were among the new forces which had a profound impact on Clausewitz and his world view. In this he was much closer to Hegel than to Goethe and Kant.

Like Hegel, Clausewitz was extremely skeptical of any concept of progress that portrayed man's development as a linear process. History unfolded in a far more subtle manner with reason encompassing not only rationality but also emotion. Clausewitz rejected, as did Hegel, the overly simplistic rationalism of the 18th century in favour of a more complex, practical view of reality. Of particular concern to Clausewitz, of course, was the nature and role of power and force in this complex reality. Both men were indisputably the products of the same age. The question now is to what degree did Clausewitz find the solution to his particular intellectual problem in the Hegelian system.

Hegel has been called the greatest systematizer of all time.<sup>5</sup> He confronted the traumatic changes resulting from the clash of the declining ancien regime with the rising forces of modernism, both political and economic, and was determined to

account for both the process and the results in a comprehensive system of thought. Clausewitz was also a systematizer, a self-confessed one, explaining in a note in 1818 that "my original intention was to set down my conclusions on the principal elements of this topic in short, concise, compact statements, without concern for system or formal connection. But my nature, which always drives me to develop and systematize, at last asserted itself here as well."<sup>6</sup> This admission revealed a mind that sought to bring the separate elements of phenomena together to discover the dynamic and logical links that would bind them into comprehensive structures.

What distinguished Hegel from other German Idealists who undoubtedly shared something of his systematic approach was his thorough-going monism. He refused to accept the dualism explicit in Kant and argued that neither Fichte nor Schelling had been able to unify adequately the Kantian system. Similarly, Clausewitz was confronted by the dualism implicit in the approaches to war represented by Lloyd and von Bulow versus those of de Maistre and von Berenhorst. The issue for both Hegel and Clausewitz was the failure of their predecessors to devise a system of thought which logically and consistently unified these dualistic models into a single whole. For Hegel the answer seemed to be in a definition and explanation which did not distinguish between types of reason as outlined by Kant. In addition, reason must not be denied power over Kantian things-in-themselves or any other aspect of reality. In the same way, Clausewitz believed in the ultimate unity of rational thought.<sup>7</sup>

Such an interpretation of how both Hegel and Clausewitz approached their respective problems is consistent with their general methodological orientation. Both men were essentially early versions of modern phenomenologists. This method of analysis holds that it is possible to give a description of phenomena as a whole which at the same time reveals their essential structure. Thus for both men there is no reality beyond or above human experience; there is just this-experience. Hegel expresses this concept succinctly in his statement that what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.<sup>8</sup> Reason is capable of describing experience and therefore making sense of it. That Hegel can be termed a phenomenologist is attested to, in part, by the title of his first, and many consider his greatest, philosophical treatise, the Phenomenology of Spirit. He approached his subsequent works from the same perspective, confirming in the mind of one of his most trenchant modern interpreters that he was above all a phenomenologist.<sup>9</sup> However, Hegel is a phenomenologist of transitions rather than forms in that the reality he describes is that of dialectical transformations.

Significantly, Clausewitz's most important English-speaking interpreter concluded that what Clausewitz attempted to do could also be called phenomenological in the modern sense.<sup>10</sup> As Peter Paret discovered, Clausewitz approached the phenomenon of war from the outside, describing and finally explaining in ever greater detail and complexity the true nature of the subject. "Our aim," said Clausewitz, "is not to provide new principles and methods of conducting war; rather we are concerned with examining

the essential content of what has long existed and trace it back to its basic elements."<sup>11</sup>

Even more striking, at first glance, than their apparently common methodological orientation, however, is their position on the nature and relationship of theory and practice. Both Hegel and Clausewitz were directly opposed to the Kantian duality of knowledge and practice. The Konigsberg philosopher's main concern was the mutual defense of scientific knowledge (Pure Reason) and the 'practical' values of morality and religion (Practical Reason). Knowledge is only possible of the phenomenal world, not of things-in-themselves (noumenal world), forever hidden from the mind. Man can manipulate the phenomenal world of nature but not create or change it. Practice was only valid in the sphere of morality and religion and thus it is here that man is truly free to choose and affect his own reality. Hegel, on the other hand, was convinced that reason was superior to nature. True to Idealism's most basic tenet, Hegel held that reason was capable of guiding practice and that therefore theory and practice must be part of the same system.<sup>12</sup>

Clausewitz also argued that it was necessary to approach theory in such a way as to end what he called the absurd difference between theory and practice. "Theory must be so absorbed into the mind that it almost ceases to exist in a separate objective way. By total assimilation with his mind and life the commander's knowledge must be transformed into a genuine capability."<sup>13</sup> The nearer theory approached an exact knowledge of experience so much the more, it seemed to Clausewitz, that it passed over from the objective form of

knowledge into the subjective one of skill in action. Clausewitz certainly endorsed the Hegelian dialectic between theory and practice in which each was part of a greater whole. Even Peter Paret, who doubts Hegel's influence on Clausewitz, conceded that the theory/practice dialectic, in which one affects and informs the other, is resolved in one of the rare syntheses in Clausewitz's whole argument.<sup>14</sup>

The significance of this particular dialectic provides a convenient introduction to the central issue of whether Clausewitz recognized and employed the Hegelian dialectic throughout On War. Certainly the general dialectical forms that were the common property of his generation characterize Clausewitz's argumentation.<sup>15</sup> He sometimes even explicitly comments on this form in relation to his subject, as for example when he refers to the "constantly recurring shadow boxing in the dialectics of war...".<sup>16</sup> More often than not, however, Clausewitz's dialectical method is less obviously Hegelian. It is no surprise that Clausewitz's methods appear less central to his thought than is the case with Hegel. This was true for most other true philosophers of the period. After all, although he was certainly philosophically minded, Clausewitz was a practical soldier whose objective in writing was, at least in part, to provide a relatively clear body of thought to fellow practitioners of the art of war. On first glance, therefore, the reader is apt to find, as did Hew Strachan, that his overall style, his combative approach of question and answer is only strongly suggestive of Hegel.<sup>17</sup> Such similarity in analysis that does exist and might suggest direct influence must

consequently be sought through careful comparison of the Hegelian dialectic to Clausewitz's actual argumentation in On War.

Hegel was convinced that he had discovered the unity he sought underlying the apparent diversity of the common sense world in the dialectic. According to Hegel the dialectic should not be understood as a method for arriving at the truth; it is the truth. Or to put it somewhat differently, the dialectic works as a method of exposition because the world works dialectically.<sup>18</sup> For Hegel change was endemic in the world and change created its own resistance. Like some of the ancient Greeks, he held that opposition and contrariety are universal properties of nature.<sup>19</sup>

This ubiquitous opposition was first explored dialectically in German Idealism not by Hegel, but by Kant. He sought to prove that if one accepted his analysis, any attempt to apply reason beyond the bounds of experience resulted in irreconcilable contradiction. Kant called these contradictions antinomies which occurred when reason attempts to apply the categories of understanding to the absolute, to the transcendent. These categories, the very structure of reason, are applicable only to empirical experience. Kant provides only four examples of such antinomies<sup>20</sup> and concludes that any more would be superfluous since his point was made. For Kant dialectical contradiction is proof by way of a reductio ad absurdum that the truth is not to be found beyond the world of "phenomena".<sup>21</sup>

Hegel was not convinced by Kant's argument and believed instead that consciousness was capable of grasping all opposing points of view and achieving their resolution. Kant had only



gone half way with his transcendental dialectic. Reason does not simply discover contradiction, Hegel said; its sole intent is to suspend antithesis.

Clausewitz does not discuss the dialectic in these terms in On War but he does indicate that he is familiar with the Hegelian concept and at least has an idea of how it resolves the issue. He observes that "where two ideas form a true logical antithesis, each complementary to the other, then fundamentally each is implied in the other."<sup>22</sup> Clausewitz saw war as a process in which the actions of both sides interweave, like woof and warp, to form something transcending both their individual efforts.<sup>23</sup> It is too early to agree that this "something" represents an Hegelian synthesis, but clearly Clausewitz was unsympathetic to any system which precluded progress to a final comprehensive resolution. Unlike most 18th century theorists Clausewitz observed the existence and effect of such phenomena as chance and the so called "military virtue" of the army, and insisted on a theory which adequately accounted for them.

At the center of the Hegelian system and the starting point for his dialectic is what Hegel refers to as the Notion. This, he says, is the logical form of the universal. In fact, in keeping with his view of the world as a coherent structure of opposites, the Notion is really the unity of the universal and the particular. We say that we know and hold the truth of things in our ideas about them. The Notion is the idea that expresses their essence as distinguished from the diversity of their phenomenal existence. Hegel shows that the universal not only exists but that it is even more a reality than the particular.

There is such a universal reality as man or animal and this universal in fact makes for the existence of every individual man or animal.

The counterpart in the Kantian system is the transcendental ideal, which the British philosopher W.B. Gallie maintains is the model that Clausewitz uses as a reference in his theory.<sup>24</sup>

But the transcendental ideal is a fictional creation of reason, a regulative device against which one compares reality to more precisely determine its category and content. The Notion plays a much more dynamic role in the dialectic and, as will become clear, more accurately reflects the use to which Clausewitz puts the equivalent in his system - the concept of Absolute War. Stripped of all extraneous concepts and ideas, the notion of Absolute War expresses the essence, the universality, of this particular phenomenon. "War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."<sup>25</sup> Theory must start with the pure essence of war since "To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would lead at this stage to logical absurdity".<sup>26</sup>

The similarity between the Hegelian Notion and the Clausewitzian concept of Absolute War becomes more apparent when the intrinsic relation between the Notion and the object it comprehends is examined. The correct Notion makes the nature of an object clear to us. It tells us what the thing is in-itself. But while the truth becomes evident to us, it also becomes evident that the thing does not exist in its truth. The potentialities are limited by the determinate conditions in which they exist. This Hegelian concept is suggestive of a connection

when Clausewitz tells us that notwithstanding the theoretical necessity for the concept (Notion?) of Absolute War, "the art of war deals with living and with moral forces; consequently it cannot obtain the absolute".<sup>27</sup> More to the point, in the abstract world both parties to a conflict not only would seek but would attain the essence of Absolute War. Clausewitz asks the rhetorical question whether this would ever happen in the real world and responds that it would if: a. War were a wholly isolated act; b. it consisted of a single decisive act; c. the decision achieved was complete and perfect in itself.<sup>28</sup> He immediately goes on to explain that in the "determinate conditions" of the real world none of these results obtain and therefore war in reality must be a modification of the pure Notion.

Associated with these determinate conditions is the additional Clausewitzian concept of friction. The essence of war, the drive to extreme violence, is impeded at every turn by a myriad of real life factors that make action in war like movement in a resistant element. Because of this friction "everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult".<sup>29</sup> Clausewitz is aware that the components of friction are too numerous to discuss in detail individually, but he is convinced that the concept is the only one "which more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper."<sup>30</sup>

Because of Hegel's determinate conditions, every existence splits up into a diversity of states and relations to other things which are originally foreign to it but which become part of its proper self when they are brought under the working

influence of its essence (Notion).<sup>31</sup> Clausewitz was himself painfully aware of the variety and diversity of war, ranging from the recent Napoleonic wars of overthrow to wars such as the so called Potato War or War of the Bavarian Succession (1778) which amounted to mere armed observation. His reaction parallels Hegel when he responds by asserting that "the multiplicity of forms that combat assumes leads us in as many directions as are created by the multiplicity of aims, so that our analysis does not seem to have made any progress. But that is not so: the fact that only one means exists constitutes a strand that runs through the entire web of military activity and really holds it together".<sup>32</sup> The means referred to is violence, or more specifically, fighting; "for fighting is the only effective principle in the manifold activities generally designated as war".<sup>33</sup> Clausewitz maintains this analytical means of encompassing all of war throughout his work and in a particularly telling passage re-affirms it through a transhistorical example: "It follows that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities .... But war, though conditioned by the particular characteristics of states and their armed forces must contain some more general, indeed a universal, element with which every theorist ought above all to be concerned".<sup>34</sup> This universal element is violence and Clausewitz uses it consistently and insistently in what can only be described as an Hegelian manner throughout his analysis.

The Notion serves yet another purpose, indeed its most important, albeit most esoteric one. The difference between the reality and the potentiality (Notion) is the starting point of

the dialectic process and applies to every concept. However, a short warning is in order. The description of the next stages in the dialectic is extremely abstract; so much so that one recent Hegelian scholar attempting to explain the process prefaces his comments with the caution that a few of Hegel's profound ideas led him to some conclusions that can strike the modern reader as bizarre, even absurd.<sup>35</sup> A student of German Idealism, in fact a contemporary like Clausewitz, would find Hegel much less difficult. Fortunately, the application of the process to the study of war, at least in the sense that Clausewitz used it, is considerably easier to grasp.

To return to the Hegelian dialectic, finite things are "negative" and this is their defining characteristic. They never are what they can and ought to be. They always exist in a state that does not fully express their potentialities as realized. The finite thing has as its essence an absolute unrest, a striving not to be what it is. The dialectic process receives its motive power from this pressure to overcome the negativity. Dialectics is a process in a world where the mode of existence of man and things is made up of contradictory relations so that any particular content can be unfolded only through passing into its opposite.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, Clausewitz refers to war in much the same terms when he observes that "being incomplete and self-contradictory war cannot follow its own laws but has to be treated as a part of some other whole".<sup>37</sup>

A concept is self-contradictory because it contains its opposite within itself. It is incomplete because it will not achieve its potentiality until it has resolved the inner conflict

and transformed itself into a greater, but not different, reality. Therefore each existence is in itself a unity of opposites. The dialectic method consequently developed out of Hegel's view that reality was fundamentally a structure of contradictions. That Clausewitz came to view the reality of war in this light is suggested by his criticism of the 18th century rationalists' theories of war. In his opinion, "they consider only unilateral action whereas war consists of a continuous interaction of opposites".<sup>38</sup>

Hegel realized that self-contradiction and apparent incompleteness arose from man's perception that recognized only isolated entities standing opposed one to the other. But reason is able to apprehend what Hegel called "the unity of opposites". The process of unifying opposites touches every part of reality and comes to an end only when reason has organized the whole so that every part exists only in relation to the whole and every individual entity has meaning and significance only in relation to the totality. Clausewitz sought to construct just such a system for war. His dialectic pairs-ends/means, rest/tension, attack/defense, moral/physical, tactics/strategy and war/peace were not isolated from one another. Nor are they merely bipolar models representing extreme or ideal concepts whose truth exists somewhere in the middle of each. Rather they are a dynamic, inter-connected system of thought, each element of which is essential for the completed structure. A closer analysis of three of the main dialectic pairs - attack/defense, moral/physical, and war/peace, illustrates the nature of the system and its unmistakable similarity to the Hegelian model.

From the outset Clausewitz distinguishes war "as a special activity different and separate from any other pursued by man".<sup>39</sup> But if it is a true unity of opposites, what then constitutes the rest of the self-contradictory unity? It is, of course, peace. That Clausewitz saw these as antitheses is made clear when he declares that "in essence war and peace admit of no gradations".<sup>40</sup> The resolution of this contradiction, or from a more Hegelian perspective, the suspension of this antithesis, represents the penultimate stage of Clausewitz's thought. Therefore its consideration will be deferred for a moment in order to reveal the main outlines of the substructure upon which it is built.

To be consistent with the Hegelian system, war itself must form a unity of opposites. In fact, war consists of a number of opposites working dialectically. The resolution of these dialectics produces the unified definition of the total phenomenon found at the end of Chapter one Book one. This trinitarian definition which represents the final stage in Clausewitz's theory, can only be understood by following the logical sequence of his thought from the beginning.

The first such dialectic and the one to which Clausewitz devotes the most space is that of attack/defense. War occurs when one side actively seeks to take or conquer something from someone else. This initiative creates the passive mode of preserving one's possessions, or repulsing the aggression. War therefore, consists of both active and passive components, the active associated with the attack, the passive with the defense. Thus Clausewitz maintained, and, significantly, reaffirmed in his

note of 1827, that "the defense is the stronger form of war with the passive purpose, attack the weaker form with the positive aim".<sup>41</sup> But the attack/defense dialectic is more profound than a simple antithesis. Just as the Hegelian dialectic cannot unfold its content without perishing, so must attack turn into defense and defense into attack. The one is contained in the other. "Defense is not an absolute state of waiting and repulsing, it is permeated with more or less pronounced elements of the offensive. In the same way the attack is not a homogenous whole, it is perpetually combined with defense".<sup>42</sup>

In the dialectic, the attack proceeds until it has achieved its military goal, which at the highest strategic level is that objective which will lead to the aim of war-peace. But the more the attack proceeds, the more the stronger form of defense is able to weaken the attacker. As time goes on the superior strength, which originally allowed the attacker to chose the weaker form of war, is depleted. More and more the defensive aspects of the attack begin to predominate and, conversely, the more active the defense can become. At some point, if the military goal is not achieved, the attacker must reach his culminating point, the point beyond equilibrium at which the attack turns into defense and the previous defender becomes the attacker, now much stronger than the original attack in relative terms. This process is inevitable and Clausewitz was adamant that "every attack which does not lead to peace must necessarily end up as a defense".<sup>43</sup>

Clausewitz asks the obvious rhetorical question: Why does the attacker not stop before he reaches his culminating point?



His answer is subtle but compelling in its logic. As long as the attack is proceeding it is succeeding and "the success one had or gains in war is only the means and not the end; it must be risked for the sake of the end".<sup>44</sup> Thus the dialectic continues until the end of the war has been achieved. As noted, however, war is an incomplete concept on its own - incomplete because it cannot determine the ultimate ends but only the means. As Clausewitz insists "its grammar indeed may be its own, but not its logic".<sup>45</sup> War is not a perpetual motion machine, of course; sooner or later the means are adequate to the end or the ends are modified to suit the means. Thus Clausewitz warns that the end cannot be a tyrant. It must adapt itself to its chosen means, a process that can radically change it.<sup>47</sup> In historical terms it was only with the rise of Napoleon that there have been campaigns where superiority has consistently led to the enemy's collapse. In the future, "a culminating point is bound to recur in every war in which the destruction of the enemy cannot be the military aim and this will be presumably true of most wars".<sup>47</sup>

The question of how ends are established for war will be considered below. The point here is whether there is a resolution, a synthesis, in the attack/defense dialectic. On War is not clear on this issue. Some commentators, including Raymond Aron, have argued that there is no synthesis.<sup>48</sup> Without yet having discussed the precise nature of Hegel's thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad it is sufficient to note in this case that the transformation of attack into defense does not result in a simple reversal of the two poles like a change in a

magnetic field. The truth of the resulting situation contains elements of the initial circumstances but it is now a new reality with far reaching implications. As Clausewitz explains "It is clear that a defense that is undertaken in the framework of an offensive is weakened in all its key elements. It will thus no longer possess the superiority which basically belongs to it".<sup>49</sup> In historical terms Clausewitz shows, for example, that a defense undertaken on occupied territory, that is, after the initial attacker's culminating point, is far more provocative in character than one taken up on one's own territory. Using the Frederician wars as an example, Clausewitz maintains that General Daun granted Frederick a period of calm in Silesia and Saxony after the Prussian king's reversion to defense, far greater than he ever would have allowed in Bohemia.

An even more persuasive example is the situation resulting from Napoleon reaching his culminating point in Russia. Not only did he have to assume the defense under very adverse conditions, but the transformation in the nature of the war resulted in a radically changed political situation including York's desertion from the French side, Prussia's decision finally to go to war and ultimately the consolidation of the final victorious coalition against Napoleon. As Clausewitz implies, this dialectic is neither Kantian antinomy nor merely a heuristic device for getting at the details of either attack or defense. It not only leads to an internal resolution but it forms an integral element of an overall theory based on a dialectical model.

A second crucial dialectic in the Clausewitzian system is the physical/moral factor in war. Although it is perhaps more

difficult to discern a resolution here, there is no doubt that Clausewitz saw these elements in a dynamic relationship. He refused to consider either one separately. So central to the Clausewitzian theory is this moral/physical factor that one of Carl von Clausewitz's most incisive and influential interpreters, Hans Rothfels, characterizes the Prussian theorist's treatment of this issue a "Copernican revolution" in the development of military theory.<sup>50</sup>

Clausewitz expressed the opponent's power of resistance as the product of two inseparable factors, the total physical means at his disposal and the strength of his will. The physical force and the moral element "interact throughout war, they are inseparable".<sup>51</sup> In Hegelian terms this phenomenon should be seen as a true unity of opposites. It resolves itself through a dialectical process. The principal moral factors are the skill of the commander, the experience and courage of the troops and their patriotic spirit. In any activity in war these will combine with physical factors (the size of the army, its technical state) as well as more theoretical factors (lines of operations or distance from the base) to produce the total effect that one side brings to bear on the other. The effects produced by physical and moral factors "form an organic whole which unlike a metal alloy is inseparable by chemical process".<sup>52</sup> The effect is the synthesis. This contains elements of both factors but results in a different reality, one might say one in which the sum is greater than the parts.

The moral/physical dialectic has an impact on two levels. The first is the effect that one opponent can bring to bear on

another. But this is a reciprocal relationship and the result of the engagement or battle will depend on which effect is greater. The dialectic is therefore crucial to a full understanding of Clausewitz's approach to battle. Unlike many who misinterpreted him, Clausewitz did not insist on the physical destruction of the enemy alone. In fact given the nature of the situation this is not even conceptually possible. Thus, "when we speak of destroying the enemy forces we must emphasize that nothing obliges us to limit this to physical force; the moral element must also be considered".<sup>53</sup> On the other hand Clausewitz most certainly did not intend to leave the reader with the impression that "a particularly ingenious method of inflicting minor direct damage on the enemy's forces would lead to major indirect destruction; or that claims to produce, by means of limited but skillfully applied blows, such paralysis of the enemy's forces and control of his will power as to constitute a significant short-cut to victory."<sup>54</sup> The moral factors in war were important but they did not negate the requirement for battle nor did they modify the essence of war - violence whose omnipresence meant that a commander must always remember that the destructive principal in war was the dominant one.<sup>55</sup> Rather in the moral/physical dialectic, Clausewitz discovered the way in which the tangible and spatial emphasis of von Bulow and Jomini - the scientific dimension in war; combined with the seemingly irrational, emotional emphasis of de Maistre and von Berenhorst - the art dimension of war.

Clausewitz succeeded in constructing a compelling account of war utilizing the dialectic approach, or, to put it in a more

Hegelian way, by revealing the dialectics of war. The Notion - Absolute War - served to drive this dialectic and this "essence of war" was constantly present regardless of which period of history was involved or what particular war. But Clausewitz's remaining problem was the vast diversity of war, ranging from wars of absolute minimum violence to those of complete overthrow. How was he to subsume all of this under one theoretical umbrella? The answer for Clausewitz, whether it came early or late in his deliberations, lay in the selfsame dialectic that had served so well in the consideration of the separate elements of war. Here the similarities to Hegel are particularly convincing. Clausewitz carries his analysis through to an obvious synthesis.

In Book VIII Clausewitz restates the clear distinction between war and peace and establishes the structure which he believes encompasses both. "... We have considered the incompatibilities between war and every other human interest, individual or social. Now we must seek out the unity into which these contradictory elements combine in real life, which they do by partly neutralizing one another. This unity lies in the concept that war is only a branch of political activity, that it is in no sense autonomous... war is simply a continuation of political intercourse with the addition of other means."<sup>56</sup> War and peace therefore constitute a unity of opposites whose synthesis is always policy or, more accurately, the political framework within which states must operate. "It [War] has to be treated as a part of some other whole, the name of which is policy."<sup>57</sup> Or again, "The main lines along which military events progress and to which they are restricted are political

lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace... in short at the highest level the art of war turns into policy ...".<sup>58</sup> Clausewitz, like Hegel, believed that war was inevitable not because of any failure of policy or inability to construct a peaceful world organization, but because of the dialectical nature of reality. History progressed through the constant interplay of peace and war, each reacting on the other and consequently always producing succeeding levels of synthesis.

This is of course the crux of the Hegelian system. The being of things consists in their transformation rather than in their state of existence. The dialectic is permanently in motion and the manifold states that things have, whatever their form and context may be, are but moments in a comprehensive process and exist only within the totality of that process.<sup>59</sup> War has revealed many different faces over the history of man because the nature of the political system has been so profoundly different. The wars of the 18th century manifested the characteristics they did because politics, in the broadest sense, shaped them. When politics change so does war. Hegel addresses this issue in his Philosophy of History when he declared that "the content of a given reality bears the seed of its transformation into a new form, and its transformation is a process of necessity in the sense that it is the sole way in which a concept or thing achieves its potentiality or reality".<sup>60</sup> An almost unending series of transformations is the way in which the particular seeks to reunify itself with its universal in the Notion. In one of several remarkably similar conclusions, Clausewitz sees that "politics moreover is the womb in which war develops, where its

outlines already exist in their hidden rudimentary form, like the characteristics of living creatures in their embryos".<sup>61</sup>

Policy is clearly a broad, all-encompassing concept in Clausewitz's system. It incorporates both internal matters and one state's relations to another. It is the unity in which war and peace co-exist and the transformation of one into the other produces a new policy framework. The constant change as this dialectic works itself through history has a direct impact on war and with one of his clearest and most profound insights Clausewitz concludes that, "it follows that the transformation in the art of war results from the transformation of politics".<sup>62</sup>

Clausewitz does not devote much effort to discussing politics or policy per se, but a comparison with Hegel's definition is highly suggestive of a connection in their thought. For Clausewitz "the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy of course is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all those interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests and vanity of those in power is neither here nor there. We can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community."<sup>63</sup> Compare this to Hegel's view, published in 1821, that "It is as particular entities that states enter into relations with one another. Hence their relations are on the largest scale a maelstrom of internal contingency and the inner particularity of passions, private interests and selfish ends, abilities and virtues, vices,

force and wrong".<sup>64</sup>

Whatever the source of Clausewitz's full understanding of the political system, he is categorical in his conclusion that "policy converts the overwhelmingly destructive element of war into a mere instrument".<sup>65</sup> The full understanding of this relationship, which Raymond Aron maintains is not reached until he writes the note of 1827,<sup>66</sup> allows Clausewitz finally to develop his "two kinds of war" formula. Some regard this formula as perhaps Clausewitz's most impressive intellectual and psychological achievement.<sup>67</sup> The Notion or essence of war is present in all types of war and distinguishes this activity from any other. It is not, however, the idea of Absolute War which allows the historical diversity of war to be subsumed under a single concept but its intrinsically political nature. War is no longer incomplete and self-contradictory, for in its resolution into policy, it has reached the culmination of the means-end dialectic. The ends-in-war are completed now by the ends-of-war supplied by policy. War's self-contradictory nature is eliminated because the logical rise to extremes implied by the pure nature of Absolute War is resolved by ends not properly part of war-in-itself but those of the higher synthesis. The ends-of-war now constitute their own dialectical relationship with the concept of unlimited war, of the war of overthrow, now opposed by that of limited war. Policy makes both kinds of war equally valid and legitimate and the notion of Absolute War ensures that each remains in accord with their basic nature. As Clausewitz puts it, policy is able to change "the terrible battle sword that a man needs both hands and his entire strength to



wield and with which he strikes home once and no more, into a light, handy rapier - sometimes just a foil for the exchange of thrusts, feints and parries".<sup>68</sup>

With the "war is policy" formula Clausewitz had finally arrived at the stage where he could definitely complete his theory. A complete and non-contradictory definition evolved from the whole substructure of dialectical synthesis was now possible. This achievement is reflected in his "paradoxical trinity" definition of war found at the end of Chapter One, Book One of his treatise On War. The tripartite definition of war alone made it possible for Clausewitz to advance from partial studies to a comprehensive and integrated analysis of war.<sup>69</sup>

It should come as no surprise that the end product of Clausewitz's work represents a synthesis of truly Hegelian proportions. Hegel's system after all was designed to illustrate in each of its aspects that the triad was the only true form of thought. Hegel does not state this conclusion in the form of an empty schema of thesis, antithesis and synthesis but as the dynamic unity of opposites. The unity is not produced by a process of connecting and combining the opposites but by transforming them so that they cease to exist as opposites although their content is preserved in a higher and more 'real' form of being.<sup>70</sup>

The ultimate product of this process would be the realization of the Notion itself as reality. The triadic model is the pure form of a reality in which every existence is the synthetic unity of antagonistic conditions. The dialectic result of all process in the world is a three sided existence in which

all the truths of the original start point have to be retained as separate truths but incorporated in an existence which now consists of three truths each dependent on the other for their reality. In addition, each of the separate truths have also been arrived at through a similar dialectic process. Thus at the highest level, as one renowned Hegelian scholar informs us, the Hegelian system is perfected as a trinity of nature, spirit and logos.<sup>71</sup>

The end result of the Hegelian system, the final synthesis as it were, is Absolute Spirit. This is the highest Notion finally realized. This spirit is fully realized and exists in its true form only when it indulges in its proper activity, namely art, religion and philosophy. All three have the same content in different form. Art apprehends the thought by mere intuition in a tangible and therefore limited form; religion perceives it free of such limitation but only as mere assertion and belief; and philosophy comprehends it through knowledge and possesses it as inalienable property.<sup>72</sup>

Hegel further argued that "it is the way of God with the world that the state exists".<sup>73</sup> That is, the state represents the embodiment of the Absolute Spirit on earth and history is the progress of this state towards its final perfection. Thus the constitution of a state is closely bound up with its religion, art and philosophy as each of these moments of the Absolute Spirit must progress towards perfection to result in the final triadic synthesis. At any given time the nature of the state would reflect the nature of these three elements; that is, the state would represent the synthesis that is represented by

this triadic model. Hegel could have said, therefore, that as a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make the state a paradoxical trinity. He did not, of course; this was Clausewitz's preface to his definition of war as being "composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force, of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy which makes it subject to reason alone".<sup>74</sup>

Like Hegel, Clausewitz could take this definition from the sphere of abstract theory and apply it to the real world of man. Thus the first aspect of the triad concerns the people; the second, the commander and his army; and the third the government. Each apprehends the truth of war but in a different form. Each element in the triad is but a moment or factor which finds its truth only when connected with the whole.<sup>75</sup>

The relationship between Hegel's system and Clausewitz's now becomes even more persuasive. Absolute Spirit apprehends the state as it is revealed in its art, religion and philosophy and also, of course, its history. It therefore apprehends the state in both peace and war at all times throughout time. Hence at times the state is peace and at times the state is war. Thus the remarkable trinity of Clausewitz is a mirror image of Hegel's triadic Spirit. Philosophy is equivalent to policy which makes war subject to reason. Art is equated to the element in which the creative spirit of genius is free to roam and religion represents the moment of blind natural force, pure emotion and faith.

Just as, the Notion, in the end, was always Absolute Spirit consisting of three separate moments, so too was Absolute War always triadic in structure. The Notion always contained the idea of both the universal and the particular resulting in the Hegelian synthesis of three dimensions. So, too, Absolute War, once fully explored and realized historically turned out to comprise not one dimension; that is violence, but three. The universal was violence while the particular - war's historical diversity in both time and space allowed for the play of chance and genius. Both were linked to the third element in the synthesis, that of policy. War as a complete phenomenon was totally explained and accounted for once the triadic nature of its Notion, Absolute War, was finally and fully revealed.

Clausewitz's final solution, the paradoxical trinity, has been accounted for in various ways.<sup>76</sup> None, however, has the theoretical elegance and symmetry of recourse to the Hegelian dialectical system. There is, of course, no proof that such was Clausewitz's model but it should now be clear that the evidence in support of the argument, although circumstantial is persuasive. But the evidence in support of a direct relationship between these two German thinkers goes beyond methodology. They shared a remarkably similar world view which profoundly shaped their respective work. It is time now to turn to their views on the state, the international system and war's place in it, to determine, if possible, whether this similarity goes beyond coincidence and can be attributed to direct influence.

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## Chapter IV

### Clausewitz and Hegel The State, The International System and War

Carl von Clausewitz believed that the creation of the modern state was one of the most important developments in history. He had carefully traced the transformations in this institution that had led to the nation-state. Above all he was sensitive to those underlying forces which buttressed the visible structures that he knew so well at the end of his life. For Clausewitz the evolution of the state and in particular the final stages of emancipation to complete autonomy could best be represented in terms of the role of force in the affairs of man. His originality in this regard is apparent in his attempt to understand the transformation of modern Europe by a historical and theoretical analysis of its military component.

This represented more to Clausewitz, however, than simply a subject of intellectual interest alone. The perfection of the state was inextricably tied to the perfection of the individual. This had a direct personal impact on his own sense of duty and self-esteem. Clausewitz's patriotism, liberty and sense of identification with the power of the state were all parts of a harmonious self.<sup>1</sup> The welfare of the state represented a matter of the highest importance. If, as Clausewitz came to believe, war and politics at the highest level were the same thing then in an environment of constant change, uncertainty and insecurity it was at least as important to understand war as

peace. In fact, Clausewitz strongly believed that an understanding of and capability in war was of greater importance since only this aspect of the state ensured not only survival but growth. In a sense then, Clausewitz's efforts to develop a philosophy of war can be seen as an attempt to develop a philosophy of politics in the tradition of Nicole Machiavelli.

Clausewitz's understanding of the state and the processes by which it arrived at its contemporary stage of development was rooted in the evolving thought of the early 19th century. This is not to say that the works of the 18th century, by men such as Montesqueiu, Herder, Rousseau and Kant, did not continue to influence his reflections. On the contrary, his early education was steeped in the Enlightenment tradition; but the modern theories of Romanticism, Nationalism and Liberalism were by 1815 a profound force in Europe and affected all thinking about politics and philosophy. Clausewitz was no exception and his insightful, thoughtful realism allowed him to see more clearly than many of his contemporaries the shape of things to come. He may not have welcomed all of the forces of modernism but he was certainly not blind to them. The result of these various influences was of course the treatise On War, which can only be understood within the context, not only of his philosophic method, but also his view of the state and its place and role in the European state system. Conversely, of course, and in keeping with Clausewitz's dialectic view of the world, his understanding of the state itself is inextricably linked to his conception of war.

It is no surprise that Hegel, one year older than

Clausewitz, should be shaped by the same influences. It is remarkable, nonetheless, just how similar were their respective views of the state and war. Although famous as a traditional philosopher, Hegel was in fact always keenly interested in politics and in particular the fortunes of Prussia and the greater Germany. It was the French Revolution above all else that inspired his Idealism. As early as 1800 Hegel was writing about the German nation and it is certainly significant that a lifetime of philosophic reflection culminated in a political tract attempting to define for all time the true nature of the state. Hegel's Idealistic philosophy can not be separated from his political views in Philosophy of Right (1821). In the same way, Clausewitz's conception of war cannot be separated from his political philosophy in On War. These two men indisputably shared a common view of the theoretical nature of international relations as well as a mutual understanding of contemporary issues and Prussia's involvement in them.

The final issue to be determined is the extent to which Clausewitz actually reflected ideas derived directly from Hegelian thought. In order to address this issue it is now necessary briefly to trace the logical development of both their systems to determine not only the frequent convergences but rather, the highly suggestive similarity in the overall framework of their thought from the state, through the nature of inter-state co-operation and conflict, to the essential role of war.

In Hegel's view the state develops through history in accordance with the same idealistic, dialectical process as every

other concept. In concrete terms the unity of identity and contradiction identified in Chapter III means that, as a rule, crisis and collapse manifest the very nature of things and hence provide the basis on which the essence of the existing social system can be understood. Hegel first depicts the state as a manifestation of Absolute Spirit evolving out of the struggle noted above into a trinity of art, religion and philosophy. However, when he moves from metaphysics to political philosophy he depicts the state in more socio-historical terms as the triad composed of family, civil society and state. The link between these two modes of thought resides in the fact that each element in each triad represents a higher level of realized freedom for man than the preceding one. Man as individual therefore is incomplete and begins his accession to even greater completion and freedom by the creation of the family. This association, while necessary, is not sufficient for the full exploitation of his potential and man's horizons are consequently expanded by the further creation of civil society.

Hegel's concept of civil society is in most ways the liberal conception of the complete state itself. Here man engages in all the well known social and economic activities and relations common in the modern world. The dominant characteristic of this aspect of the state is competition. Man competes in civil society both as an individual and in what today we would call 'special interest groups', but which Hegel refers to as 'corporations'. Private property arises in civil society and with it division of labor and finally the class system. Hegel argues that in civil society man is satisfying what are in

essence selfish needs and that this attempt results in a society composed fundamentally of three components or 'moments'. First, there is the mediation of need and one man's satisfaction through his work and the satisfaction of the needs of all others - the System of Needs. Second, the protection of private property through the administration of justice; and third, the promotion of collective interests by the formation of 'corporations'.<sup>2</sup>

The key perspective here for a full understanding of Hegel's position, as well as Clausewitz's, is the idea that the state as manifested by 'civil society' exists to serve the individual. However, Hegel denies that the state 'as finally realized' exists for individuals. This is where the great distance between Hegel and the Enlightenment can be seen. In part reflecting Romanticism's influence, Hegel rejected the Enlightenment's utilitarian idea that the state has only an instrumental function, that the ends it must serve are those of individuals.<sup>3</sup> The individual, according to Hegel, actually achieves his full expression only within the context of a state which subsumes civil society within itself. The state puts forward and asserts the real interests of its members by welding them into a community, in this way fulfilling their freedom and their rights and transforming the destructive force of competition, inherent in civil society, into a unified whole. The state is therefore a living organism within which individuals form an integral part. Responsibilities and duties are reciprocal but ultimately it is the state as a collective organism which is supreme.

Clausewitz, who, like many of the other Prussian reformers,

had been influenced by the thought of Adam Smith and the French Physiocrats, held a conception of free enterprise very similar to Hegel's idea of civil society. He nonetheless was convinced that this conception must be incorporated into one in which the state was held over and above this level of societal organization.<sup>4</sup>

Clausewitz regarded the state as an organism, an individual whose life extended through the centuries. He thought of the state as the great supra-individuality which revealed itself in the unfolding of history.<sup>5</sup> To him the state, not individual people, was the essential reality. Politics was the personified intelligence of the state and through this process the pattern of absolute thought revealed itself. In 1812, frustrated by Prussia's reluctance to forego the dubious advantage of neutrality and declare war against Napoleon, Clausewitz left the Prussian state service and joined the Russians. His Bekenntnisschrift (Memorial of Belief) of that year justified this decision by arguing that the idea of the state was far more important than its reality at any given time and those who recognize the ethical essence of the state have the right to judge its formal political leaders - even the king.<sup>6</sup> Clausewitz's action at this juncture in his life, albeit traumatic as well as presumptuous, revealed a view of the state as an ideal which stands above individual men and from which they derive their full meaning and freedom.

Certainly it is too early here to postulate any direct connection between Hegel and Clausewitz. The organic theory of the state infuses both their systems; but this was a powerful idea before either began to publicly articulate their views. The

state as an organism received its first major theoretical justification from the work of Edmund Burke and his reactions to the French Revolution. Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) was translated into German in 1794 and had enormous influence throughout Germany, particularly on the Romantic movement. Here both Herder and Müller developed the theme of the state as an historically based entity with qualities reminiscent of a living organism. That both Hegel and Clausewitz were forming their respective philosophical positions in the context of this school of thought is no proof of a direct relationship. Nonetheless, Hegel took this line of thinking well beyond its initial position and distilled out of it all remaining ambiguity regarding the status of the individual in the resulting political community. Hegel's final synthesis best provides the theoretical as well as emotional/intellectual basis for Clausewitz's ultimate position.

The internal authority of the state vis a vis its individual members has its counterpart with regard to other states in the concept of sovereignty. Hegel was uncompromising in his belief that the national interests of the particular state were the highest and most indubitable authority in international relations. Within a given state each of its members achieves his full independence and freedom by virtue of his total absorption into the ethical state which transcends civil society. Thus the individuality of each member is a reflection of the individuality of the state itself. The state's individuality, dependent on its freedom and autonomy, cannot be constrained or violated by other states without destroying it, together with all its

individualities existing as such in civil society. A state's so-called "national interests" are manifestations of its individuality and must be pursued with vigor and force if they are to prevail over the interests of other sovereign entities in the dialectical struggle of state against state.

For Hegel, at stake here was the continued existence of the Absolute Spirit on earth - the state. Its preservation was paramount and could not be risked in order to pursue uncertain courses based on supposedly peaceful solutions to interstate problems. In nothing else was Hegel so unmeasured as in his condemnation of sentiment and mere good feeling; what he called bitingly "the hypocrisy of good intentions" which he believed to be always either weak or fanatical and in both cases futile.<sup>7</sup>

In nothing did he disbelieve so completely as in the power of unorganized good will to accomplish anything in a world where effectiveness is the final criterion of right. It is not sentiment, in his view, that makes nations but the national will to power translating itself into institutions and a national culture. Clausewitz's position was very similar, although if anything he was even less concerned with moral questions, let alone cultural or aesthetic ones. His was a specific political problem - how to transform what he saw as potentially much more than an area sharing a common culture into a determined political entity, a confident and militant nation-state jealous of its reputation and its freedom.<sup>8</sup>

It is crucial to a complete understanding of Clausewitz's relationship to Hegel to appreciate how far from earlier 18th century thinking about the state both these men had come. In



political philosophy Hegel represents the end of the halting, even groping, progression of thought from the Enlightenment forward into the 19th century, which moved from the universalistic, rationalistic theories of absolutism through the cultural and then political state to the complete power state. Clausewitz's thought may take its character from the period of transition from absolutism to the nation-state but it ends up precisely where Hegel's does.

Enlightenment thinking on this subject came to fruition in Kant's Perpetual Peace. This work not only reflected past theories of international relations but provided an influential basis for the perpetuation of cosmopolitan and/or liberal perspectives of the future. Nation states in this approach were no doubt the wave of the future but their independence and security would depend ultimately not solely on their own power but also their proper integration into a community of like minded states; a sort of super confederation of states. Kant held that the problems of internal order within states and the problems of external order amongst states are inextricably linked and thus the supposed division between domestic and international policies is an artificial one.<sup>9</sup> In this approach universal principles and interests apply to states and it is a matter of discovering what they are and then to establish practices and institutions to promote them. States had 'national interests' of course, but they were not paramount. Reason would ultimately show how they could and must be subsumed under more universal considerations.

The 18th century theory of the balance of power reflected this view of international relations to a large degree. States

were distinct entities but not absolute individualities in Hegel's terms. Each had common interests which could be realized through mutual, if only implicit, agreement. Not an absolute increase in power but the perpetuation of the whole system was the end of this version of the balance of power theory. Other more optimistic versions based on the Kantian approach foresaw the possibility of more formal, supra-national systems for the long term preservation of peace.<sup>10</sup>

The French Revolution and its aftermath, of course, profoundly affected this whole constellation of Enlightenment theories of the state and international relations. The forces of Nationalism and Romanticism focused men's minds on the requirements for the establishment and preservation not only of cultural nations but their conversion into politically viable nation-states. In Prussia in 1809 the preeminent German political philosopher of Romanticism, Adam Müller published Die Elemente der Staatskunst in which he concluded that the struggle for power and its own interests are expressions of a state's natural function and are derived from an inner necessity.<sup>11</sup>

By this time Napoleon had already taught the one great lesson which when combined with German Idealism would culminate in Hegel's political philosophy; that is, that the universal currency of politics is power. Well aware of Napoleon's message by 1814, another Prussian historian, Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831), could write "only a political entity that is independent and capable of willfully asserting itself and claiming its rights can be called a state, not an entity that cannot entertain such a thought at all, that must align itself

with a foreign will, submit to it and follow it whenever such action seems most favourable to survival.<sup>12</sup> Niebuhr, however, still left the theoretical door open to a voluntary association of states such as the Holy Alliance of 1815 in which each state could derive security from a source outside of itself. This was not tenable in the Hegelian view.

Certainly the Prussian reformers after 1806, led by Stein, Humboldt, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, all pursued the goal of a strong, independent Prussia. The obvious lessons of the Napoleonic period were not lost on them. None, however, was able totally to distinguish between the cultural nation of Germany and its distinction from a true power state. In every case their thinking stopped short of a completely autonomous political entity whose own power made it totally self-sufficient. Their conceptions of a national state were always circumscribed by universalistic principles. 18th century cosmopolitanism retained a strong grip on political thinking throughout this period. Thus the majority of the reformers consistently articulated an idealistic picture of the state comprising significant cosmopolitan, rationalistic elements not yet emancipated from an 18th century mind set. The state was to be a mixture of cultural nation and a political, autonomous entity but not yet a power state. In all cases, for example security was to be found at least in part, through commonly accepted norms and expectations usually associated with membership in one sort of international organization or another. Both Friedrich Meinecke and Hans Kohn have argued convincingly that the thinking of these men, and in particular Stein, remained rooted in European universalism.<sup>13</sup>

Both Hegel and Clausewitz can be distinguished from this type of thinking by the virtually perfect synthesis of idealism and uncompromising political realism in their theories. One might even see this as a reflection of their respective dialectical resolutions of the moral and physical factors in politics and war. At any rate, in Hegel's Philosophy of Right the extreme realism of his position repeatedly shows through the idealist framework and terminology. It almost goes without saying that similarly Clausewitz's On War represents the epitome of realpolitik. It comes as no surprise therefore that both men were profoundly influenced by Nicole Machiavelli and his theory of power politics.

Hegel fully accepted Machiavelli's teachings with regard to the overriding nature of states' interests. Politics is a struggle for power, in which passions drive men forward, though in the background the universal spirit corrects its course. Hegel agreed wholeheartedly with Machiavelli that the state could not clash with morality since it established the higher standards itself. "When politics is alleged to clash with morals and so to be always wrong, the doctrine propounded rests on superficial ideas about morality, the nature of the state and the state's relations to the moral point of view."<sup>14</sup>

Clausewitz also felt a strong intellectual affinity with a thinker such as Machiavelli, who insisted above all else that the state was an institution created and maintained by the realistic use of force. "No book on earth is more necessary to the politician than Machiavelli's [The Prince]"<sup>15</sup> according to Clausewitz. In all Machiavelli's works military strength is a

decisive criterion in the evaluation of a state's independence. "The chief foundations of all states, new as well as old, are good laws and good arms; and as there cannot be good laws where the state is not well armed it follows that where they are well armed they have good laws."<sup>16</sup> The state must be well armed because there exists no higher authority than force if one state wishes to impose its will on another. In the ruthless world of power politics war was the final arbitrator. This being the case Machiavelli advised that "a prince ought to have no other aim or thought nor select anything else for his study than war and its rules and disciplines".<sup>17</sup>

Clausewitz assumed that the national interests of a state were clearly discernible and in large measure identified with the power of the state relative to other states. Power was the essence of politics just as violence was the essence of war. He was aware of the hopes and aspirations of political thinkers and statesmen who subscribed to theories which proposed structures and formulas to moderate force in the international sphere. Clausewitz, however, dispensed with these in an almost cavalier manner in On War by declaring that "attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning known as international law and custom".<sup>18</sup> This succinct sentence probably more than any other reveals Clausewitz's adherence to the power state concept and thus his desire to ensure that those responsible for the well being of his own state understand fully its implications. He, like Hegel, totally disdained 'mere good feelings' and in his own area of interest admonished leaders that "war is such a dangerous

business that mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst. It could be futile, even wrong, to try and shut our eyes to what war is from sheer distress at its brutality".<sup>19</sup> One can hardly imagine Machiavelli putting it any more starkly.

By 1819 Clausewitz's realpolitik had developed to the point which distinguished him clearly from most contemporary Prussian men of affairs. These latter still retained strong non-political elements in their proposals for a strong German state secure from outside interference. The unity of Germany which Stein and his followers had wished to see brought about by the organic processes of history could in Clausewitz's opinion only be realized by the sword.<sup>20</sup> One state would have to bring all others into subjugation. Clausewitz actually thought it almost childish to imagine a unified Germany coalescing in the context of either a cultural community or as the result of the natural forces inherent in a confederation. Force would inevitably be the tool through which a power state achieved a full integration of all of Germany. The Government's most urgent task was therefore to maintain Prussia in the ranks of the major powers to ensure that it was through the medium of Prussia that the final German nation-state emerged.<sup>21</sup>

Such was Clausewitz's view as exposed in his only formal statement of political philosophy the Umtriebe (agitation) written in the early 1820's. Walter Görlitz argues that it was because of this attitude that as early as 1815 he advised the aggrandizement of Prussia through the elimination of the Saxon, Thuringian and Hessian principalities.<sup>22</sup> What would appear to less Hegelian political thinkers as pessimistic, if not

actually militaristic, was in fact a direct product of Clausewitz's view of the state as the highest manifestation of Providence on earth. It is truly Hegelian in that it admits of no possible compromise such as those included in all earlier schemes partially based on more cosmopolitan notions.

As late as 1831, just before his death, Clausewitz re-affirmed the view which pervades On War of states' interests and of the role of force in their pursuit. In response to the revolutions in Europe of 1830-31 he attempted to publish an article entitled "Reduction of the many Political Questions Occupying Germany to the Basic Question of Our Existence". He was not successful in getting this article accepted, but a diary entry explained clearly his motivation. With regard to the Polish revolution, Clausewitz foresaw that the restoration of Poland was possible only at the expense of Prussia since it could only increase the strength of France who would align herself with a re-established Poland. He therefore explained that in his recent polemic "I sought to make it clear that something besides cosmopolitanism should determine our position on the Belgium, Polish and other questions - that German independence was in the gravest danger and that it was time to think about ourselves".<sup>23</sup>

Resort to the sword was the inevitable result in a system such as Hegel's. In the continuously changing constellations of power, one state's interests must sooner or later clash with that of another. "It follows that if states disagree and their particular wills cannot be harmonized the matter can only be settled by war."<sup>24</sup> War therefore must settle not which right

is true and just, for both sides have a true right, but which right shall yield to the other. Nor should it be taken from the above quotation that it must remain at least possible for a state's particular will to be harmonized with another's after they have clashed. For Hegel, war is the inevitable issue of any test of a state's sovereignty and sovereign states will always clash. "As a reflection of an essential moment of the state, war has necessarily to occur."<sup>25</sup> For Hegel to formulate prescriptions for peace apart from the realization that war is not a lapse in the natural state of affairs but is an integral part of their structure was to foster illusion.<sup>26</sup> In much the same way Clausewitz came to see war as an inevitable and integral part of the state's functions.

Hegel's viewpoint is diametrically opposed to that of Kant, who argued that the problem of war is a reflection of man's failure to conceive properly the principles whereby permanent peace can be established. The elimination of war, according to Kant, is essentially a conceptual and organizational problem. War is regarded as an unnatural state of affairs that exists because of man's present inability to grasp the means for peace. But those means are available and are subject to inevitable discovery by reason and therefore "the guarantee of perpetual peace is nothing less than the great artist-nature".<sup>27</sup> Consequently Kant offers the world directly a theory of peace, Hegel a theory of war.

But Hegel's theory of war was by no means mere fatalism. In his system, dialectical struggle is an ubiquitous process and in this struggle war takes its place as a necessary, in fact,



ethical element. Within the individual state man pursues his private, selfish interests in civil society. These interests must be integrated at a higher level of community than can ever be accomplished in this partial aspect of the state. The hidden hand of self-interest may have been enough for political philosophers of the Adam Smith school but for Hegel the required integration could only be accomplished in moments of great crisis and pressure. War's necessary function, therefore, was to embody the primacy of the universal in man and state.<sup>28</sup> In Hegel's own words: "War has the higher significance that by its agency the ethical health of peoples is preserved as their indifference to the stabilization of finite institutions, just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm so also corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged let along 'perpetual peace'".<sup>29</sup>

Clausewitz reflected exactly the same view of war as not only inevitable but also a phenomenon with ethical content. Indeed, his description of the normative function of war, although only briefly covered in On War, is extremely telling with regard to his debt to Hegel. "Today practically no means other than war will educate a people in this spirit of boldness; and it has to be a war waged under daring leadership. Nothing else will counteract this softness and the desire for ease which debase the people in times of growing prosperity and increasing trade. A people and nation can hope for a strong position in the world only if national character and familiarity with war fortify each other by continual interaction."<sup>30</sup> Clausewitz

was thoroughly convinced of the requirement for this familiarity in the real world of Restoration Europe. In a memorandum entitled Our Military Institutions, written in 1819, he warned that Prussia had the need to arm her entire people so that she could withstand the inevitable clash with the two giants who would always threaten her from east and west.<sup>31</sup> His cold realism revealed itself again in On War when he advised that leaders who neglect the necessity of war run the serious risk of losing everything. In almost painfully graphic words Clausewitz announced that: "We are not interested in generals who win victories without bloodshed. The fact that slaughter is a horrifying spectacle must make us take war more seriously, but not provide an excuse for gradually blunting our own swords in the name of humanity. Sooner or later someone will come along with a sharp sword and hack off our arms".<sup>32</sup>

A number of political philosophers before Hegel had acknowledged that war was an unfortunate byproduct of states' relations with one another. Most of them, following Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant, were confident that this institution should nonetheless be dismantled the more man subjected himself to the dictates of human reason. On the other hand, many of those in the Romantic school of thought often depicted war in emotional terms which were by no means always negative. They frequently saw value in a phenomenon which reflected, indeed often magnified, aspects of human character not subject to reason alone. In their view human qualities such as courage, honor and sacrifice frequently reached their highest levels of expression in war. Adam Müller even anticipated significant elements of

Hegel's theory when he concluded that "war gives states their outlines, their firmness, their individuality and personality".<sup>33</sup> But all these theorists and statesmen held back from assigning to war an unqualified legitimacy. Even the most conservative and nationalistic retained some element in their thought which gave promise of a future, no matter how distant, in which war would or could be eliminated as a factor in human affairs. Hegel, however, was the first major German philosopher to finally give war an unqualified and definite sanction. "War received its place through him, in a world view that more than any other before it sought to grasp the rational order of the world."<sup>34</sup>

Clausewitz was enormously receptive to a system of thought which assigned organized force a determining influence in world affairs. Hegel's view of a dialectical reality where struggle is a creative principle fully accorded with Clausewitz's conclusions. In Hegel, form and substance come together in a system which, if it did not directly influence the Prussian military theorist, represents a remarkable parallelism in their thought. This is especially true when we realize that Hegel's theory did not conclude here having assigned war a role as some kind of moral end in itself. Rather in Hegel, war, despite its integrative role, remained a means resorted to when states were forced to reconcile their sovereign will.

Force was an ever present factor in international relations but for Hegel this did not mean simply that might was right. Each state, all states in fact, retained their status as embodiments of the Absolute Spirit on earth. Resort to war could

not entail the abandonment of their recognition of each other as states. War therefore was always undertaken as a limited action with peace as its end. "The fact that states reciprocally recognize each other as states remains, even in war - the state of affairs when rights disappear and force and chance hold sway - a bond wherein each counts to the rest as something absolute. Hence in war, war itself is characterized as something which ought to pass away. It implies therefore the proviso of the jus gentium that the possibility of peace be retained."<sup>35</sup> War took place because a state's national interest was at stake; it was a nation-state's policy which resorted to war when necessary. However, that policy never lost sight of the fact that war would end, both states would continue to exist and peace therefore had always to be anticipated and prepared for.

Clausewitz also held it to be self-evident that states should go to war if they deemed it necessary.<sup>36</sup> But like Hegel, Clausewitz was well aware of the mission of a nation's policy in creating peace and order. A state must remain militarily strong in order to achieve the greatest independence possible as well as promote its national interests. No state could count on any other, nor any organization or treaty to ensure its absolute sovereignty or survival. But Clausewitz was no militarist; a state made war only with a view to the type of peace that was sought. As Gerhard Ritter has so perceptively noted, Clausewitz demanded that both goals be combined and harmonized in politics, the military stance and the principal of constructive peace.<sup>37</sup> It is appropriate here to recall a quotation used at the end of Chapter III which illustrates more

than any other both the interdependence of Clausewitz's dialectic method with his substantive theory of politics as well as his final word on the relationship between war and peace. "The main lines along which military events progress and to which they are restricted are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace."<sup>38</sup>

Clausewitz constantly saw politics as a moderating rather than an aggravating element. In Raymond Aron's view Clausewitz was a preacher of moderation, not excess.<sup>39</sup> Politics in fact was the instrumental factor in the actualization of Hegel's Absolute Spirit acting through the state and war, as its instrument, must always bear the character of policy. "The conduct of war in its great outlines is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws."<sup>40</sup>

Here, then, is the startling nexus of Clausewitz's and Hegel's dialectic method with their substantive views on the nature of the state. War must occur, but in every case it was conducted with a view towards the state of affairs resulting after the peace was signed. A state's policy may demand the complete overthrow of an opponent's ability to resist but this was by no means mandatory. In fact only rarely would this be feasible, even if desirable. Clausewitz was convinced by this stage of the development of his thought that limited ends utilizing limited means was a perfectly legitimate policy to pursue. The unlimited/limited war dialectic was legitimized by virtue of the absolute supremacy of state policy and the requirement that all states continue to operate in a state system

throughout peace and war. Whether we talk about Clausewitz's "two concepts of success" in Book VIII or his "two kinds of war" in the Note of 1827 or Delbruck's conceptualization of the two strategies of annihilation or attrition, it is clear that if peace is the end of war then a state's policy must be able to utilize limited means commensurate with limited ends. As in Hegel's quote above force and chance hold sway in war but political intelligence has the final word in the "remarkable trinity" in order to reflect the permanent nature of the Absolute Spirit on earth.

By the time Hegel had published Philosophy of Right in 1821, he had arrived at a thoroughly consistent theory of the state and international affairs, firmly rooted in his philosophical method and system. All of his mature life Clausewitz sought this same consistency for his theory of war. Unfortunately, Clausewitz's theory as revealed remains incomplete although he appears to have felt capable of completing it to his own satisfaction if he had had time for one last revision. Because Clausewitz's works were not published until after his death (in the same year as Hegel) there is virtually no question that the two men were unable mutually to complement each other's thought. Clausewitz, however, was exposed in Berlin not only to Hegel's writing and enormous reputation but also the man himself who lectured regularly at the University of Berlin. We have seen that the thought of both men developed in the same environment and was exposed to and influenced by many of the same stimuli. They 'belong' in the same intellectual category. However this similarity in broad outlines is almost too close to be mere

coincidence in some important detailed respects.

Reviewing the foregoing analysis it seems more than likely that Clausewitz may have taken specific cues from Hegel with regard to (a) the absolute nature of the power state and its philosophical justification. (b) the inevitability of war and its ethical component; and (c), the limitations on war imposed by virtue of the necessity of a state's policy to retain absolute recognition of its opponent and an absolute awareness of the inevitable coming of peace.

The correspondence and linkages between each respective theory are compelling evidence that the one, that is Clausewitz's, was not developed in isolation from the other. When their respective substantive views on the state, the international order and war are examined in conjunction with the philosophical methods by which they constructed their completed theses the results are more than merely suggestive. The concluding chapter will now attempt a final assessment of their interdependence as well as a brief examination of the relevance of such a conclusion for the study and understanding of Clausewitz today.

ENDNOTES  
CHAPTER IV

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14. Hegel, section 337.
15. Kohn, p 220.
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17. Ibid. p 21.
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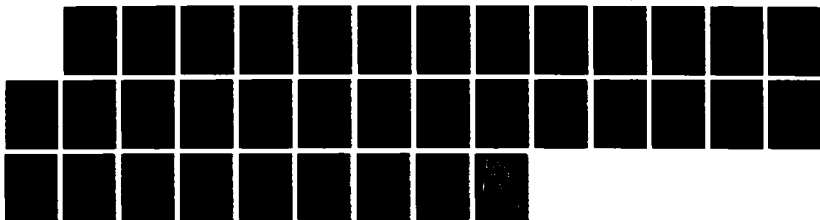
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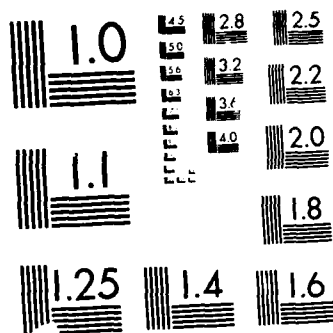
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30. Clausewitz, p 192.
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33. Meinecke, p 118.
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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Was Carl von Clausewitz directly influenced by G.W.F. Hegel? The foregoing analysis has clearly established a marked similarity in approach that goes beyond mere coincidence. Both men were faced with a world in the process of traumatic change and each was determined, in his own sphere of interest, to capture the nature of this change in a unified, consistent theory. For Hegel the issue was the nature of history itself, the movement of the idea of history or Absolute Spirit through time. For Clausewitz it was, in fact, a particular version of the same question - the movement of war and its change through history.

Both men were direct heirs of the 18th century European movement known as the Enlightenment. Even more significant however, was their intimate connection with one of the Enlightenment's major subsequent intellectual developments - German Romantic Idealism. It is of particular importance to note that Hegel himself was a crucial figure in the creation of this school of thought. Clausewitz, on the other hand, a keen student of the movement, was in effect, largely a consumer of its perspectives and methodological approaches. He did not make his major contribution to the body of its works until the posthumous publication of On War.

Considerable evidence indicates that Clausewitz was not only aware of Hegel's role in the intellectual life of his times but

actively sought to adopt some of his methods and views in the pursuit of his own goals. This analysis, unfortunately, cannot be definitive in its conclusions. Influence is a nebulous concept and degrees of influence are virtually impossible to determine accurately. Nevertheless, the analysis itself, notwithstanding its indeterminate status, allows a deepening of one's understanding of the nature of Clausewitz's work. The mere fact that both men lived and worked at the same time within the same intellectual context provides a valid perspective from which to assess their work. Thus a specifically Hegelian perspective does cast new light on the reasons for the continued influence of Clausewitzian thought since his death in 1831 as well as his relevance in today's world. It remains now to turn very briefly to the views of several other interpretations of Clausewitz's place in German Idealism. In the main these support the contention that Clausewitz's work can be best understood from an Hegelian perspective. The study then concludes with a few remarks on the relevance of the Hegel-Clausewitz linkage for today and the future.

A number of people who have read Clausewitz over the years have found him, if not Hegelian, at least markedly abstract. This reaction can be accounted for, in part, by the fact that his work reflected a particular mode of reasoning and expression common to many thinkers in the period when Romantic Idealism reigned supreme in Germany. His apparent abstraction may actually account for the failure of some of his readers to discern a clear connection to Hegel's thought. Faced with the difficulty of fully understanding his work many a reader no doubt

either abandoned the effort prematurely or stopped short of this realization in a superficial reading of his thought.

Clausewitz was, it seems, a particularly difficult writer to interpret in the Anglo-Saxon world. Often this led to his being ignored, or worse, only partially read and even less understood. Michael Howard, for instance, has remarked that Clausewitz was held in "contemptuous ignorance" by British soldiers. The British military historian and theorist G.F.R. Henderson partially accounted for this by explaining that "Clausewitz was a genius, and geniuses and clever men have a distressing habit of assuming that everyone understands what is perfectly clear to themselves".<sup>1</sup> Another influential British military analyst at the turn of the 20th century observed that Clausewitz, although not an obscure writer was yet a difficult author to read. Spenser Wilkenson concluded that this could be attributed to the fact that "he was under the influence of the Berlin fashion of his day for philosophy".<sup>2</sup>

But it was not only English speakers who found Clausewitz difficult. His most prominent French biographer Hubert Camon warned his readers that "the book On War is certainly not easy. Its teuto-philosophique nature discouraged a French reader"<sup>3</sup> [my translation]. This difficulty of course, did not necessarily derive from Clausewitz's roots in Hegel. Nonetheless a number of students of Clausewitz have made this very connection explicit. Camon specifically identified the close association between the two Idealist authors as follows: "Hegel, who was teaching at the University of Berlin at the same time that Clausewitz was directing the Military Academy, seemed

to have a particular impact on the mind of Clausewitz".<sup>4</sup>

A second French biographer of the great Prussian military theorist took issue with the nature of Peter Creuzinger's strong argument in Hegel's Einfluss auf Clausewitz (1911) that Hegel directly and explicitly influenced Clausewitz. Nevertheless, even Paul Roques saw persuasive evidence of a relationship between the two. He concluded that not only did Hegel and Clausewitz have common roots in Kant, Montesquieu and Machiavelli but "their minds seemed to share the same perspectives and intellectual attributes".<sup>5</sup>

In more recent times both Peter Paret and Raymond Aron have examined the influence of Hegel in Clausewitz's thought. Although somewhat equivocal both attributed little, if any, direct influence to Hegel. Both are convinced that the sources of Clausewitz's efforts can be found only in German Romantic Idealism. They prefer in the end, however, to see the final structure in On War as a unique achievement, albeit one fashioned in accordance with the spirit of the times. Their position is by no means unchallenged in the contemporary literature. Several military historians and strategic theorists of well known stature have maintained that Clausewitz, in fact, cannot be fully understood outside of an Hegelian framework. Some of these authors have been mentioned in earlier chapters. Of particular note is Bernard Brodie's charge that Paret underestimated Hegel's role in the development of Carl von Clausewitz's theories. Similarly, John Tashjean has also purposefully alluded to an Hegelian connection.<sup>6</sup>

Turning to the question of the relevance of Hegelian

influence, the views of Soviet soldiers and scholars on this issue are of major significance. In 1972, in his Principles of Operational Art and Tactics, V. Savkin stated categorically that "German Idealism was the philosophical basis of Clausewitz's theory, but Clausewitz's enormous advantage is the application of Hegel's dialectical method".<sup>7</sup> Savkin's reference to Clausewitz reflects a long tradition of Russian and Soviet interest in the Prussian theorist's work. The first references to Clausewitz can be found as early as 1836 in the works of N. Medem, an instructor at the Nicholas Staff Academy. Clausewitz's works were well known at the Academy throughout the 19th century. His influence can be seen in General M.I. Dragomirov's Textbook of Tactics (1879) as well as much of the work of General A. Leer, Commandant of the Nicolas Academy from 1889-1998.<sup>8</sup>

Clausewitz might well have retained an important influence in Soviet thinking simply through the transmission of his ideas via ex-Tsarist officers in the new Red Army after 1917. In fact, any doubt that Clausewitz should remain a subject for study in the Soviet military after the revolution was removed by V.I. Lenin. Lenin made a detailed study of Clausewitz and it is his interpretation which reveals in part one consequence of the Hegelian link for an understanding of Clausewitz today.

Both Marx and Engels had read On War. Each was led to the Prussian theorist by his keen awareness of the nature of struggle in the world and the role of power and force in the international system. Clausewitz therefore appealed to them but he did not occupy a notably central position in their thought. Each man, but particularly Engels, also studied other 18th and 19th century



military theorists including Willisen and Jomini. It is therefore not until Lenin read On War in 1915 that it is possible to refer to what one scholar of Soviet military thinking refers to as "the militarization of Marxism".<sup>9</sup> Until this time Marxists had to account theoretically for war as a byproduct of the class nature of society, but lacking power themselves they were never compelled to come to grips with how to utilize war to further their own aims. This, of course, all changed with WWI and the coming to power of the Bolsheviks.

Especially interesting for the theme of this study is the fact that Lenin made a careful study of On War in the early months of 1915. Fortunately, he also kept a lengthy, detailed notebook of his thoughts and conclusions.<sup>10</sup> The key to the significance of Lenin's study resides in the fact that he had just completed an in-depth analysis of the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel. Lenin previously had not been concerned with a need to fully grasp the roots of Marxist philosophy. He was usually more occupied with the pragmatic issues of the interpretation from a Marxist perspective of current events, the structure of contemporary politics and the modalities by which the Bolsheviks could take power. Consequently Lenin's detailed study of Hegel in 1913-1914 was a revelation and he himself subsequently stated, "It is impossible to completely understand Marx's Capital, especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied the whole of Hegel's Logic."<sup>11</sup>

Immediately following his study of Hegel, the Bolshevik revolutionary turned to On War. Referring back to Hegel's Logic, Lenin concluded that "applied to wars the basic thesis of

the dialectic ... is this, that war is simply the continuation of politics by other means. Such is the formulation of Clausewitz, one of the greatest writers on questions of military history, whose ideas were engendered by Hegel.<sup>12</sup> A rather remarkable chain of thought had been completed by Lenin. Hegel's Dialectic Idealism had originally been the basis for Karl Marx's Dialectic Materialism. In his later years however, Marx tended to de-emphasize the dialectic in favour of the materialistic basis of his socio-economic theories. Lenin had initially understood Marx primarily in terms of this historical materialism. However, after his reading of Hegel it is possible to discern a transformation of Lenin's Dialectic Materialism from an emphasis on the latter to the former aspect. Thus sensitized to the dialectic nature of reality, Lenin was able to absorb Clausewitz due to the latter's basis in Hegel's Dialectic Idealism - one of the philosophic roots of Marxism.

Lenin legitimized Clausewitz for all future Soviet military theorists. There is no doubt either that Clausewitz has occupied a central place in Soviet thought ever since. The three leading Soviet military thinkers of the 1920's and 1930's, Frunze, Tukhachevsky and Shaposhnikov, were all keen students of the Prussian. W.B. Gallie has noted the significance their involvement as well as that of many other Marxists when he concludes that "what can be granted and indeed cannot be over-emphasized is that it is in the politico-strategic writings of the Great Marxists from Engels to Mao that we find the most intelligent appreciation and application which Clausewitz's teachings have received to date".<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Michael

Howard has observed with apparent concern that "Clausewitz is studied in Soviet military academies today with an attention which deserves to be noticed, if not imitated in the west".<sup>14</sup>

There is of course a fundamental shift in interpretation when Clausewitz is transported across the great divide between Idealism and Materialism. In the original Clausewitz, war is the continuation of the policy of the idealized state. This supra-intelligence reflects something like the general will of the Hegelian state. In Marxist-Leninist theory this state has been replaced by the concept of class. War is now the policy of a particular exploitive class pursuing its limited self-interest. War remains inevitable until capitalism is completely destroyed which thus eliminates the class basis for this institution.

Naturally, since 1917 there has existed an organized instrument for the destruction of the capitalist system in the form of the Soviet state. Therefore, in Soviet thought war as a continuation of this particular state's policy retains an ethical element reminiscent again of Hegel. War has a positive, useful function to perform in tearing down senile institutions and forms of human relations which are impeding the development of the living forces of humanity. Therefore, notwithstanding the Marxist-Leninist substitution of class for state in Clausewitz's theory, the Prussian remains a key element in the Soviet view of war and its role in the modern world. Clausewitz's unique place in the Soviet pantheon of military theorists derives in large part from his Hegelianism.

Turning to the Western world, and in particular Anglo-American thought in the 20th century, the relevance of the

Hegel-Clausewitz connection is less obvious. Additionally, its final significance in a liberal/democratic context may well not be what was expected. As Michael Howard points out, Carl von Clausewitz had barely gained even a modicum of recognition in Western politico/military thought at the turn of the 20th century when the First World War completely discredited him. Whether or not it was a misinterpretation of his thought at the hands of men such as Liddell-Hart and J.F.C. Fuller is less important for the moment than that his perceived militarism did not accord well with the prevailing anti-war mood in post-war Europe and the United States.

Liberal/democratic theory during this period maintained what was in effect an inconsistent, often ambiguous relationship with the concept of war. War was a deplorable phenomenon but it was generally felt that once the regrettable decision to go to war was made there was a strong tendency to let the generals get on with defeating the enemy and getting back to a state of peace as quickly as possible. During these times of peace a nation's interests were best served, according to liberal traditions, by pursuing a policy of building impediments to war. Thus in this century we have seen first the creation of the League of Nations and then the United Nations. Such efforts might have been tolerated by Clausewitz, but he would have had no faith in their cosmopolitan, universalistic attempts to substitute collective security for a sovereign state's requirement for total self-reliance. In between the inauguration of these two supra-national organizations and continuing down to the present a myriad of liberal/democratic initiatives have sought to moderate,

control and finally eliminate war from the affairs of man.

This latter goal for example is best illustrated by the ill-fated Kellogg-Briand Treaty of 1927 which sought explicitly to renounce war as an instrument of a state's policy. It is difficult to find a more convincing expression of an anti-Clausewitzian nature. This treaty reveals more clearly than anything else that at the root of Western liberal/democratic theory lies one proposition diametrically opposed to Clausewitz; that is, that war is not a continuation of policy by other means, it is in fact a failure of policy.

But somewhat paradoxically Clausewitz has had an increasing influence on Western political and military thought since 1945. This is due in large measure to the early impact of nuclear weapons on modern theories of international relations. More than ever before in man's history it now seemed imperative to control war. The Clausewitzian concept of a war of annihilation or overthrow was unthinkable. But this same theorist offered, it seemed, two related answers to the dilemma facing soldiers and statesmen in the second half of the 20th century. In the first place there were, according to Clausewitz, two kinds of war; unlimited war had its counterpart in a war of limited ends. The strategy of annihilation was complemented by a strategy of attrition where battle was only one means among many to achieve a political goal. In addition, and of fundamental importance, the choice of which kind of war a state embarked on was a matter of its own policy. Equally compelling was Clausewitz's argument that policy remained responsible for the conduct of the war throughout its prosecution.

It may be merely fortuitous but just as the nuclear era dawned Clausewitzian scholarship received a major impetus with the publication in 1952 of Professor Warner Hahlweg's celebrated 16th edition in German of Vom Kriege. At approximately the same time the United States, leading a coalition of more or less like minded states, was trying to come to grips with the idea of a war in Korea consciously limited because of the perceived dangers of escalation in the new nuclear age. Thus the renewed diffusion of Clausewitz's ideas came precisely at a time when the western world was most receptive to the political dimension in Clausewitz. This confluence of disparate factors may well account for the fact that the whole of Clausewitz's theory with all its implications may not have received a completely balanced assessment.

In the years immediately following Korea several attempts to formulate theories of limited war were made. Most of these were based, at least partially on von Clausewitz's ideas. Thus Robert Osgood in a pioneering effort in 1957 entitled Limited War, attempted to account for the nature of the conflict in Korea as resulting from what was in fact the old liberal conception of the prosecution of a war and the new nuclear realities:

"Despite the General's affirmations of limited ends and limited means he was in fact motivated by a conception of war that was antithetical to all such limits. The administration implicitly operating upon the basis of Clausewitz's conception of war imposed definite restraints upon the military effort in the light of superior political considerations. MacArthur, however, was temperamentally incapable of tolerating those constraints if they conflicted with his single minded determination to meet force with maximum counterforce in order to secure

a clear cut victory."<sup>15</sup>

Osgood's work was an early representative of a whole school of strategic thought which grew up on the late 1950's and early 1960's. This movement was led by men such as Bernard Brodie, Herman Kahn and Thomas Schelling in America together with some extremely influential Europeans such as France's Raymond Aron. Although by no means all of the same mind, the major themes underlying the work of these scholars and others were similar enough to lead to these men being characterized as the neo-Clausewitzians.<sup>16</sup> Anatol Rapoport for example, argued that notwithstanding differences in emphasis amongst members of this group they all shared a common belief in the validity of raison d'etat and the legitimacy of resort to the use of force in a state's self-interest. Rapoport was adamant however that in the atomic era any paradigm which legitimized war was no longer valid. The fundamental changes brought about by nuclear weapons, if they did not render Clausewitz irrelevant, made the application of his theories unacceptable dangerous and risky.

It is not the purpose of this final chapter to attempt to resolve this issue in liberal theory. Rather the case of the neo-Clausewitzians is referred to here for the light it casts on the question of the relevance of the Hegelian system in On War. There is as we have seen a direct connection between Clausewitz and Soviet military thought which seems to rest on firm philosophical grounds. This situation is not necessarily analogous in the western world. The role of the state, at least in theory is not perceived in Anglo-American thought as it is in Hegel, Clausewitz or Marxist-Leninism.

Western thought on this issue is more eclectic than Soviet, relying less on a uni-factor theory of man and the state. Essentially, however, the state exists to serve man either individually or in groups. There is of course a certain mutual interdependence and reciprocity in terms of responsibilities and duties. However, fundamentally it is man as individual who takes precedence not a metaphysical rendition of an abstract collectivity known as the "state". The state therefore cannot move dialectically through history because it does not exist as any kind of entity separate from its constituent parts.

Given the equivalence of the state and war in both Hegel and Clausewitz noted in earlier discussion it is difficult to see how the Clausewitzian model can be easily absorbed into western liberal political theory. Thus the tension in Clausewitz's thought between a state specifically resorting to war to further its interests and the same state moderating its military effort in light of so called political intelligence is perhaps not so clearly perceived in the western liberal tradition. The question posed for western thought when Clausewitz is viewed from an Hegelian perspective is whether one can count on political intelligence to continue to control the dangers of nuclear war or whether a totally different theory which accepts the need for the long term end of war must be demanded.

These latter questions are far beyond the scope of the present study. However, they do highlight the importance of fully understanding the implications of a complete acceptance of the Clausewitzian paradigm. Before this is done the Hegelian connection must be considered for both its validity, and assuming



this, its true relevance to modern strategic thought. It is, for example, of perhaps more than passing interest that General-Secretary Gorbachev has chosen, in his attempt to restructure relationships with the west, to specifically reject Clausewitz as an acceptable theoretical authority in today's world. Thus in his recent book Perestroika he has baldly stated that:

A way of thinking and a way of acting, based on the use of force in world politics have formed over centuries, even millennia. It seems they have taken root as something unshakable. Today they have lost all reasonable grounds. Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of policy only by different means, which was classical in his time, has grown hopelessly out of date. It now belongs to the libraries. For the first time in history, basing international politics on moral and ethical norms that are common to all mankind, as well as harmonizing interstate relations has become a vital requirement.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of this study the above statement deserves to be carefully considered. The question of whether Gorbachev is actually serious about a new rapprochement with the west is really beside the point here. Rather that he should chose to repudiate an absolutely central theme in Soviet political theory by rejecting its originator by name is significant whether or not the effort was intended for its propagandistic value or was absolutely sincere. Clausewitz's relationship to Marxist-Leninism, discussed above, conveniently of course, allows the current Soviet leader to disassociate himself from a currently undesirable policy theme without having to confront Lenin directly. However, the point is that it may turn out to be extraordinarily ironic if just as Clausewitz's influence is

reaching its peak in the west it is waning in the Soviet Union. In light of the apparent reversal in Clausewitz's fortunes at the hands of Gorbachev, Rapoport's thesis perhaps deserves renewed consideration. Are we in fact seeing, through the medium of today's neo-Clausewitzians a further "militarization of liberal/democratic theory"?

Clausewitz's application of the Hegelian dialectic in his study of war allowed him to combine his Idealism with his Realism. It is this realistic dimension of Clausewitz's thought which above all seems to appeal to his advocates in the Western world. In an undeniably threatening world this realism offers a tempting, indeed often necessary antidote to naivete and wishful thinking. But in the case of Clausewitz one should never forget the Idealistic dimension of his theory and its implications. That war can be characterized as a continuation of policy is only possible within the Clausewitzian system because struggle and conflict are endemic in this world and therefore politics is war. In the nuclear era it is only prudent to be very confident that such is irrevocably the case before retaining a strategic world view based largely on Clausewitzian precepts. Again, one should remember that it was Clausewitz's Hegelian Idealism which led to his "remarkable trinity" definition of war. Here admittedly political intelligence is a key factor. However, it is the nature of the dialectic that both military commanders as well as the passion of the people sometimes have decisive influence on events.

This study does not recommend that simply because Clausewitz was influenced by Hegel it follows that Clausewitz must be

consigned, as Secretary-General Gorbachev would have it, "to the library". There is much in Clausewitz that helps us understand not only the past but also the present. Conflict and war are ever present aspects of today's world and On War continues to inform discussion and reflection about how best to cope with this situation. Even today this treatise remains perhaps the only work capable of bridging the vast diversity of war created in the 20th century by the appearance of nuclear weapons and insurgent revolutionary warfare. It is remarkable in fact just how similar our circumstances are in this regard to those facing von Clausewitz after the French revolution and Napoleon in the early 19th century.

But notwithstanding his relevance for the present Clausewitz's roots in Hegel and German Romantic Idealism must make us constantly review his utility for the future. The dialectic of confrontation, the struggle for power, as inherent in today's world as it was in Clausewitz's, is increasingly counterproductive in a strategic setting dominated by nuclear weapons. Hew Strachan's conclusion to his masterful European Armies and the Conduct of War is particularly apropos here: "None the less the reiteration of Clausewitzian maxims remains insufficient. Nuclear strategy cannot ignore the potential effects of nuclear weapons. The means for waging war have now outstripped the objectives war can achieve.... The global threat of nuclear weapons is so great as to make simple reliance on rationality an insufficient security. Political restraint cannot guarantee restraint in war itself. Weapons systems, not political ends, could determine whether a war is total or not.

Restraint must therefore be applied to the means as much as to the ends of war".<sup>18</sup> The challenges facing the world today demand a different approach for the future than Clausewitz alone has to offer, at least on the political level. Just as Clausewitz himself represented a 'Copernican Revolution' in military thought in his lifetime so too do circumstances in the last quarter of the 20th century suggest the desirability of a major change in the basis of our strategic thinking. Thomas Kuhn argued in his The Structure of Scientific Revolution <sup>19</sup> that science proceeds not incrementally but by quantum jumps when current knowledge cannot be contained by the old, existing paradigm. Perhaps today strategical science is in this situation thus demanding a major "paradigm shift" in order to make sense of today's world in preparation for tomorrow.

Given the nature of the Clausewitzian dialectic such a paradigm shift involves far more than simply exorcising the Prussian theorist from current thinking. The totality of Clausewitz's thought creates a seamless web of means and ends proceeding from tactical doctrine through operational guidance to the very political objectives of states themselves. His theory is rooted in his conception of the nature of the state and the demands that its sovereignty places on it. To move beyond Clausewitzian dictums requires a profound understanding of our own view of the state and the nature of the concept of sovereignty bestowed by centuries of western political tradition. Just as Hegel's position remains more problematic in this tradition than in Marxist-Leninism so does Clausewitz's.

Nonetheless, lest these concluding remarks be misconstrued

as overly utopian the final word will be left for Carl von Clausewitz himself. Until an international structure evolves which precludes the recourse to organized force in the affairs of man, the Hegelian dialectic, which provides the motive force behind the dynamism of Clausewitz's vision, has left us with at least an interim means of controlling mankind's destiny. For as long as there is war it must continue to be treated as merely a continuation of policy with the admixture of different means.

ENDNOTES  
CHAPTER V

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